

Abstract

CHRISAWN, MARGARET SCOTT. The Political Ideology of Lazare Carnot, 1784-1815. (Under the direction of K. Steven Vincent and Keith P. Luria.)

The purpose of this study is to identify the political ideology of Lazare Carnot and to trace its development and determine its consistency throughout the years of Carnot's active involvement with a variety of French revolutionary régimes. Since the historical literature has varied widely in both its interpretation of Carnot's politics and its assessment of the importance of his revolutionary career, particular attention has been given to an overall picture of Carnot's ideology, with attempts to place it in the context of the specific political events in which he actively participated. In addition, the study defines Carnot's ideology in terms of the specific principles which were subject to compromise or adaptation to political conditions, and those which remained constant and inflexible in spite of the obvious disparity in the régimes Carnot served.

Secondary literature was consulted and evaluated in terms of this study's objectives, while Carnot's published reports and speeches and the remaining portions of his personal correspondence, were used as primary material.

**The Political Ideology of Lazare Carnot
1784-1815**

by

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I. INTRODUCTION

Lazare Carnot's role in the French Revolution, especially during the critical and controversial years 1793-1794, has often been overlooked or minimized by historians intent on following the careers of better-known revolutionaries. When they have addressed Carnot's political career at all, they usually interpret it in terms of the "austere republican" who was the "organizer of victory," or as the revolutionary whose "versatile ambition" permitted him to serve disparate régimes. However, each secondary interpretation does address to a greater or lesser degree the major issues of Carnot's political ideology, its stability through twenty-odd years of political change, and his involvement with the revolutionary armies.

Of the secondary sources, Marcel Reinhard's biography of Carnot¹ is the most balanced account, which attempts to determine whether Carnot's public actions were consistent with his professed beliefs. Hippolyte Carnot's memoirs of his father² are laudatory, as one would expect, though they are valuable for the many citations from Carnot's private

¹Marcel Reinhard, Le grand Carnot. 2 vols. (Paris: Hachette, 1952).

²Hippolyte Carnot, Mémoires sur Carnot, par son fils. 2 vols. Paris: Pagnerre, 1861-1863).

correspondence. P.-F. Tissot's early work³ does much to perpetuate the traditional "organizer of victory" legend, but his overall view of Carnot's political career is somewhat ambivalent. Tissot appears not to have arrived at any definite conclusion in regard to Carnot's politics; instead he prefers to list Carnot's strengths and weaknesses as he sees them, but without saying whether the one outweighs the other. Huntley Dupre's biography⁴ contains extensive quotes from Carnot's speeches and reports, and a very thorough bibliography which he has used to recount the details of Carnot's life. Dupre says his intention is to permit Carnot to "speak for himself," but beyond the quotes and paraphrases which he cites in abundance, Dupre offers little analysis of Carnot's actions or motivations. Among the authors of works on the revolutionary period as a whole, Georges Lefebvre⁵ gives Carnot the least attention, labeling him a "bourgeois conservative" of little importance. R. R. Palmer's book on the "Year of the Terror"⁶ sees Carnot as a

³P.-F. Tissot, Mémoires historiques et militaires sur Carnot. Vol. 19 in Collection des mémoires relatifs à la Révolution française, eds. Barrière and Belville. (Paris: Baudouin Frères, 1824).

⁴Huntley Dupre, Lazare Carnot, Republican Patriot. (Oxford, Ohio: The Mississippi Valley Press, 1940).

⁵Georges Lefebvre. The French Revolution. 2 vols. Trans. E. M. Evanson and J. H. Stewart. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).

⁶R. R. Palmer, Twelve Who Ruled. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973).

political figure who became a revolutionary and a radical during 1793-1794, without explaining precisely how and why this was so. Ramsay W. Phipps' study of the revolutionary armies relegates to the background Carnot's role in the reorganization and subsequent development of those armies⁷. Aulard takes Carnot to task for his defense of his role on the Committee of Public Safety, and castigates his "lawyer-like" arguments, which seem to Aulard to dodge the issue of political responsibility with a superficial ease⁸. Reinhard's analysis therefore is the most satisfying because of its thoroughness, its largely non-partisan viewpoint and its consistent attention to the important issues of Carnot's ideology and his application of it in varied political situations.

This study is limited to an examination of Carnot's political thought. More specifically, it will attempt to identify precisely what that political ideology was, to focus on the question of whether Carnot's ideology changed as governments changed, and to assess how his involvement with the revolutionary armies enhanced or altered his political views. Secondary sources have not fully answered

⁷Ramsay W. Phipps, The Armies of the First French Republic. 5 vols. (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980).

⁸F. A. Aulard, The French Revolution. A Political History. 4 vols. Trans. Bernard Miall. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910).

these questions, and it has therefore been necessary to consult the following primary sources: Carnot's published speeches before the Assembly and the Convention, his official acts as a member of the Committee of Public Safety and the government of the Directory, and the surviving portions of his personal correspondence.

These sources indicate that Carnot's political ideology was divided into those principles which he was willing to adapt to specific political exigencies in the successive and quite different governments which he served, and those principles to which he remained inflexibly attached and refused to alter, even when that refusal led to his political and personal downfall. The evidence also suggests that the more flexible portion of Carnot's ideology included the Enlightenment concepts of the sovereignty of the people, the guiding force of the general will, and the idea that the general interest should prevail over individual interests. The inflexible portion included Carnot's aversion to factions, which he viewed as inimical to political unity; his belief in social and political equality, which he interpreted as equality of opportunity based on merit and talent; his conviction that one must obey the legitimately established government, even if it was not the form of government one preferred; his opposition to privilege and what he considered unjust social distinctions based on birth and fortune; and his belief that warfare should be a matter

of defending one's own nation rather than attempting to conquer the nations of others.

This study, using Carnot's writings, speeches and personal correspondence, will show that it is the flexible portion of Carnot's ideology, which he usually expressed in somewhat vague and general terms, that indeed underwent several transformations during his political career. The study will also show that Carnot repeated, almost to the point of redundancy, his adamant adherence to the principles he refused to modify, and it is this portion of his ideology that he articulated with consistent precision. While it may appear that Carnot's actions sometimes contradicted his principles, especially from 1793 onwards, it is also apparent that the core of his beliefs remained unchanged from the beginning of his political life as a deputy to the end of it as a permanent exile proscribed by the Bourbons.

II. THE FORMATION OF AN IDEOLOGY

Carnot was born in 1753 at Nolay in the province of Burgundy. His solid and moderately prosperous bourgeois background influenced to some extent his political views, but those views did not represent a consistently bourgeois ideology. Carnot came to believe that social and political equality, for instance, was more important than the rights of property, and he also believed that merit and talent rather than noble birth and fortune should be the criteria

for advancement. On the other hand, he thought that the men of merit and experience who should dominate politics were far more likely to come from his own middle class than from the largely uneducated masses. Carnot's background gave him the means to attend the engineering school at Mezières from February 1771 through the end of December 1773, and insured him the patronage of a noble friend of the family. He accepted the assistance, which also helped to secure him a first lieutenant's commission in the Royal Engineering Corps in 1773, but even noble patronage could not assure advancement for a non-noble engineer beyond a captain's rank, which he reached in 1783.

Carnot also formed certain political ideas during the early years of his engineering career. These ideas were in part the legacy of the Enlightenment, a legacy which he shared with many of his contemporaries who accommodated themselves to the exigencies of political and social realities while they philosophized over the Social Contract and other popular works. Carnot accepted some of Rousseau's political thinking--the concept of the general will, the sovereignty of the people, and the dominance of the general interest over individual interests--but his essentially practical nature and penchant for mathematically logical reasoning led him to adapt these concepts to later political situations in which he would be involved. Though many of his contemporaries later discovered divergent meanings in

the Revolution when it arrived, Reinhard says that Carnot would see, with a certain inflexibility (of "the austere republican," perhaps?), only the opportunity for the realization of his own developing political ideology.

Certain principles which Carnot formulated for himself, regardless of their origin in Enlightenment ideology or in personal experiences, remained constant throughout his political career. These principles were a belief in political and social equality of opportunity based on merit, the elimination of unjust privileges and distinctions, the elimination of political factions, and an adherence to the legitimately established government in whatever form it might take, even if it was contrary to his political preferences. Carnot had certain other principles which he would be willing to modify according to political circumstances, although he always intended that the modifications be temporary. These principles included his belief in the sovereignty of the people, tolerance or at least indulgence towards the opinions of others, political moderation rather than extremism on either side, and the defense of territory rather than the conquest of the territory of other states.

Carnot's mathematical and engineering orientation dominated other facets of his character, and meant that the practical side generally outweighed the idealistic, and his constancy towards portions of his political philosophy grew

patently inflexible. He would yield on other points when it seemed absolutely necessary to him to preserve unity or the appearance of unity, but his acquiescence was usually accompanied by a verbal or written protest. Carnot's actions while he served on the Committee of Public Safety and in the Directory demonstrated that he was not a team player, nor was he concerned with augmenting his own popularity. No one ever thought that he was charismatic, and for this reason Carnot never attracted a personal following, and no party gathered around his philosophy; the latter certainly ran counter to his principles in any case.

There were men other than Carnot who better exemplified the revolutionary spirit which overthrew the Ancien Régime, Hippolyte Carnot admits, but he says that there was no better republican, in the traditionally ethical sense of the word, who firmly believed that "one can never separate one's cause from that of the people."⁹ If at some future date a republic was established in France--an adventurous

⁹Other writers besides Hippolyte Carnot have labeled Lazare Carnot a "republican," but it seems more of a general description of the revolutionary politicians as a whole, possibly for the sake of convenience, rather than as an accurate definition of Carnot's political philosophy. The term "republican" applied to Carnot describes his character more than his politics: the austere republican in the antique Roman mold, for instance. Although Carnot spoke continually of the republic and of republicans in general, he did not use those terms for either himself or his ideology. The evidence suggests that his ideology, if a label is required, seems to be that of an enlightened *philosophe*.

notion, to be sure, for republics by definition were small and France was very large--Carnot believed it should be based on "intellectual patriotism and philosophical principles," where "the true citizen is the true philosophe, a citizen of all places." Reinhard credits some of Rousseau's ideas with which Carnot became familiar during the 1780s with influencing his "Cato-like jealous concern for the public welfare," a concern which certainly owed a debt to the general will or the public good as a guiding force. However, Reinhard does not explain in any detail these specific concepts nor does he cite Carnot's own views on any of them. He does suggest that they are moral rather than political concepts, and that their inherent idealism would cause Carnot significant problems later when he attempted to reconcile both his pragmatic nature and his political ideals with the extremely complex task of fashioning a viable government in the midst of chaos, dissenting public opinion and factionalism.

Hippolyte Carnot argues that his father never lost his fundamental belief in the sovereignty of the people, in the collective will being greater than the individual will, and in the fact that the rights of the state of necessity supersede those of its citizens. It is true that Carnot maintained this fundamental belief, but the political ideology emanating from it was subject to modification. If these beliefs are by and large products of the

Enlightenment, Carnot's personal codicil to them is a product of the revolutionary circumstances which made his addition necessary: "All political measures are legitimate as long as they serve the interests of the state." This statement contradicts the concept of the sovereignty of the people and the inalienable nature of the general will, but concepts must be put into practice for them to have any appreciable results. Carnot believed in practical tests for political ideals just as he believed in practical tests for mathematical models and engineering problems, and if the test distorted the ideal in order to benefit the public good, then Carnot rarely hesitated to favor practical application over philosophical rumination.

The Eloge de Vauban

The Academy of Sciences, Arts and Belles-Lettres of Dijon awarded a gold medal every other year since its founding in 1740 for essays in science, literature and public morality; Rousseau won the prize in the latter category in 1751.¹⁰ In 1781 the Academy announced that a prize would be given for a eulogy of Marshal Vauban, the seventeenth-century master of modern fortifications and siege warfare, the founder of the Royal Corps of Engineers and the Order of Saint-Louis. None of the essays submitted

¹⁰Dupre, p. 26.

were considered worthy, and the Academy reintroduced the topic in 1784. This time the Academy selected Carnot's essay as the winner, noting that in addition to his "noble, precise and vigorous" style, the author demonstrated sound scholarship, a wide-ranging knowledge of the subject, and patriotism.¹¹ Many revolutionaries may have invented their politics after 1789, but if one reads between the lines of the Eloge de Vauban, as Reinhard suggests, it is apparent that the basic principles of Carnot's political ideology were already well-formed by the time he wrote the essay in 1784. Both Reinhard and Hippolyte Carnot see the Eloge as a cleverly-disguised political statement; Huntley Dupre sees it chiefly as the prize-winning tribute to an innovative engineer. The Eloge is a political statement, although it is difficult to ascertain whether Carnot intended to be deliberately deceptive about its political content. Perhaps he was his usual straightforward self, and only later historians have suggested that he was vague because the political climate at the time made directly expressed opinions against the status quo unwise. In any case, Carnot himself used the opportunity to recognize Vauban's political views which he shared and to clarify his own; his admiration for Vauban's fortresses was incidental.

¹¹Dupre, p. 26.

On 2 August 1784, Carnot read his essay before the Academy; Prince Henry of Prussia was among the audience, and the Prince de Condé awarded Carnot his gold medal. Prince Henry was sufficiently impressed to offer Carnot a commission in the Prussian army, which the latter politely declined. Condé's opinion is not known, but he could have little idea that the essayist of 1784 would later use his literary skills to vehemently denounce Condé and the rest of the emigré princes as traitors, and worse.

As a subject worthy of praise, Vauban was a logical choice for Carnot. Both men were born and raised in the province of Burgundy, both chose the military for a career and trained as engineers, and they shared similar practical and mathematically inclined temperaments, as well as a shared dislike for social distinctions based solely on birth and fortune. Carnot knew that Vauban's accomplishments extended beyond the science and art of fortifications, and that his innovative engineering was made possible through his intellect, finely-tuned by an aptitude for higher mathematics and geometry. Carnot also knew from Vauban's writings that he was a reformer in political and social areas, and that he was "the enemy of an inhumane inequality."¹² He had found the excessive inequality of personal fortunes, the large number of highly-paid but

¹²Reinhard, 1:77.

essentially useless government functions, the paths to advancement opened only to those with the proper social and financial status, and the inequitable division of taxation, together with the inequitable manner of tax collection to be the chief causes of disorder in France. Vauban was ahead of his time, Carnot thought, and he argued that Vauban's confidence in human reason which was capable of initiating reforms and which valued political morality seemed misplaced or at least overly optimistic, even in the enlightened era. "This century is not yet philosophical enough for [Vauban's] dreams to be realized...he outdistances his own time, and his language may be understood only by posterity."¹³

Carnot expressed two of the principles in the Eloge de Vauban which he never abandoned or compromised at any stage of his public career. These principles carried equal weight with him, and he elaborated on them at every opportunity. The first was an adamant opposition to factions of any kind, and to the sort of political maneuvering which factionalism provoked. Vauban himself had no love for political divisions, Carnot pointed out, and during his intermittent political career he kept aloof from court intrigue and believed that flattery had no place in politics. Vauban's position in this respect was one which was compatible with

¹³Dupre, p. 30.

Carnot's own temperament, and it was one which he began to emulate.¹⁴

The second principle was Carnot's equally strong enmity towards privilege and unjust social distinctions. Vauban had proposed nearly a century before that the ranks of the nobility be opened to men of merit as well as to those of fortunate birth, but he was specifically concerned with upward mobility in the military. When Carnot wrote the Eloge, he believed as Vauban had done in the criteria of merit and talent, and while the ranks of the nobility were more accessible to non-noble aspirants in Carnot's time than in Vauban's, there were still barriers. Carnot's advancement in the army, for instance, depended upon his ability to prove some sort of familial nobility for at least four generations, and in this context, the officers' ranks were less open than the ranks of the nobles. Carnot's aversion, therefore, arose from his personal experience--the inability to advance beyond a specific rank in the army, the loss of a would-be fiancée for whom he lacked sufficient status--and from some undifferentiated philosophical tendencies assimilated through reading Rousseau's works, particularly the Social Contract, while he attended the engineering school in Mezières. Vauban had believed that government should establish a sort of equilibrium among its

¹⁴Dupre, p. 28.

citizens, and Carnot wrote that it should at least eliminate the excessive misery of some and the excessive opulence of others.¹⁵ Vauban's program to implement some measure of equality was outlined in his treatise on the *Dime royale*, but tax equality was not a popular subject; the king was displeased and ordered the suppression of Vauban's works.

Vauban's ideas were not new, and neither were Carnot's amplifications of them. Had Carnot been more forceful, more personally outspoken in his views on privilege rather than extolling Vauban for having expressed them, the essay probably would not have won, nor would Cortot, the royal censor, have written "Approved. I have found nothing here which would prevent its publication."¹⁶

The Eloge is not a revolutionary work, and the ideas which Carnot expressed were not particularly startling, but it is important as Carnot's first political statement, oblique though it appears. The Eloge is political because it discusses, through the medium of Vauban, the political, social and economic realities which were as true--and as unfortunate--in Carnot's time as they were in Vauban's. It is political because it establishes what Carnot is for--reason, virtue and equality of opportunity--and what he is against--privilege and factions. Carnot thought that reason

¹⁵Dupre, p. 29.

¹⁶Ibid., n. p. 290.

would triumph over the traditional prejudices which only served to separate citizens from each other, while virtue, which he associated within the general context of the Roman republic, would unify all citizens. Equality meant the removal of the artificial social barriers erected by the accidents of birth and fortune, and the substitution of merit as the criterion for advancement and recognition. Belief in reason and virtue was not unique; it was pervasive among Carnot's contemporaries who were educated in the same mold. "I was born in the century of the *lumières*," Carnot wrote later, "and I saw the dawning of human reason and the triumph of eternal truth over ancient prejudices."¹⁷ It was not a complete triumph, however, but a hope that would commit Carnot to a struggle that lasted all his life.

Carnot wrote that Vauban was the perfect model of a Roman "from the happiest times of the Republic,"¹⁸ but there was nothing new about this analogy either. The Enlightenment practically insisted on familiarity with "the Ancients," and Carnot fulfilled the requirement. Love for the virtues of the Roman republic gave him some particular qualities--the outlook of a moralist, disinterestedness, the "pride of the incorruptibles,"¹⁹--which he shared with

¹⁷Reinhard, 1:81.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 1:77.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 1:17.

others of his generation. Later in his career Carnot would frequently refer to the various "noble Romans"--and a few ignominious ones--in his speeches and reports, and the newer emphasis on the words "liberty," "nation," "equality," and "virtue" appeared as regularly as they did in the speeches of nearly every other practitioner of the art of revolutionary rhetoric.

If the Academy of Dijon applauded the patriotism it saw in the Eloge, it was the sort of patriotism which glorifies a hero of one's country and, by extension, the nation which made such a hero possible. Carnot's patriotism was not so obvious, either in the Eloge or in later writings; it was more the kind of "intellectual patriotism," not uncommon at the time, that allied itself with philosophical principles. Such a patriotism of reason suited the engineer, who saw in it a way towards reforms creating a rational society "conceived like a machine,"²⁰ but it would hardly inspire an outpouring of patriotic feeling in those who listened to Carnot, unless they were intellectuals of a similar disposition. While Carnot's public writings and speeches are generally reserved in style and tone, certainly in comparison with the outstanding revolutionary orators Vergniaud and Mirabeau, and later Robespierre and Saint-Just, it is unfair to assume that Carnot had little

²⁰Reinhard, 1:81.

emotional attachment to "the Nation". On the contrary, he was intellectually and emotionally committed to his country, but his style of expression normally emphasized the intellectual at the expense of the emotional.

The Eloge was therefore a beginning for Carnot, but a beginning of which he was unaware. With the gift of historical hindsight, one can see that events intervened and prevented the Eloge from being simply the work which followed the extremely technical Essai sur les machines written in 1783 and preceding the Mémoire au sujet des places fortes written in August 1788 and published in March 1789. Instead, Carnot developed and clarified seminal ideas in the Eloge, and he presented them, more fully articulated, later in unforeseen circumstances in which he would play an active role. Carnot's predilection for abstract reasoning was obvious in the Essai; the tendency modified itself in the Eloge, but as Reinhard has pointed out, Carnot would generally tend to confuse politics and mechanics. It is true that Carnot's mathematically logical thinking preferred the precision of mechanics to the untidiness of politics, but he thought in general that political bodies should function as smoothly as machines. When the politics of the Revolution appeared disorderly, divisive and frequently chaotic, Carnot's analogy was no longer viable and he had some difficulty understanding why it no longer functioned. On the other hand, Carnot's political ideas frequently

leaned towards generalizations rather than towards specifics, and his preference for the abstract reasoning of a mathematician prevented him from ever exhibiting the facile and chameleon-like qualities of a true politician, and certainly no one would mistake him for a statesman.²¹

Three years after the Eloge, Carnot presented an essay entitled Le Pouvoir de l'habitude to the Academy of Arras on 25 May 1787. This essay on the power of custom and tradition was less rhetorical than the Eloge had been, since the subject did not require the sort of prose associated with eulogies. Instead, Carnot's style was exceptionally restrained and showed much more of the engineer than of the poet. Carnot explained that the essay's purpose was to prove that nearly all moral laws originate from custom or habit, and that in the absence of custom these moral laws are insufficient for the needs of society. Morality [la morale] is the science of customs or mores [la science des mœurs], he argued, and he related that science specifically to civic and social morality. Custom by itself, on the other hand, no matter how firmly entrenched it is, does not make citizens obey laws or make them devoted to the public good, but it does make them happy. Carnot concluded that

²¹Reinhard, 1:103.

custom and moral law together are therefore necessary to produce good citizens.²²

For the most part, Carnot's practical nature was not always in accord with Rousseau's philosophical ideas, at least in this essay. While the influence of Rousseau in general and the Social Contract in particular on many future revolutionaries is usually acknowledged by historians, that influence for Carnot was largely undifferentiated, and formed at most a loose basis for some of his political ideas. Rousseau's concept of humanitarian actions--the feeling of pity, for instance--and Carnot's differ. "Whosoever helps some unfortunate person through simple compassion does so only to avoid a painful scene for himself. You cannot base morality on pity and trust in the naturally good inclinations [of men]"²³, Carnot wrote with an obvious lack of idealism.

The essay further outlines the transformations in the existing political and social order necessary to establish the foundation of universal morality [la morale universelle], which the power--or authority--of custom and tradition could change into a "true, sane, and practical morality."²⁴ Carnot said that the practical basis of moral

²²Lazare Carnot, Le Pouvoir de l'habitude, eds. L.-N. Berthe and M. de Langre. (Arras: Académie des Sciences, Lettres et Arts, 1971), p. 136.

²³Carnot, p. 139.

²⁴Ibid., p. 141.

conduct lay in the power of custom, and that philosophy and religion, concepts in general rather than specific views or sects, were also fundamental to morality. The power of reason was necessary as well, he continued, and precepts dictated by reason "are properly speaking the body of morality, but [it is] a body without a soul, a body to which the power of custom alone can give life and movement. This power is to morality what the authority of the sovereign is to legislation."²⁵ Carnot believed that the people and the general will were the true sovereign, and not the king. This belief would explain to a great extent his later conviction that the king had betrayed both the practical and the philosophical principles of morality and the tacit contract which the general will imposed between the ruler and the ruled. The logical punishment for this sort of betrayal was death.

The patriotism and the politics alluded to in the Eloge were more precisely defined in the Mémoire au sujet des places fortes. A discussion of fortifications and their defense seems an unlikely choice for political commentary, but such was Carnot's style. His essay stated that the French military forces should be conceived and organized as a logical function of the nation's external politics. Fortresses predating Vauban's innovations and those which he

²⁵Carnot, p. 156.

had built on the frontiers were sufficient deterrent to foreign invasion, Carnot thought, especially when the army massed behind the fortresses. The key word here is "behind"; Carnot opposed offensive warfare on principle. "France should remain within the limits which nature has assigned her...she can only grow weak in attempting to expand," he wrote, "for her interest is to completely abjure the spirit of conquest and to confine herself to the defense of her possessions."²⁶ Carnot also explained in detail his views on the "universal republic...[that] great political ideal which considers all nations as parts of the whole," an ideal to which France should remain faithful."²⁷ He had made nearly the same statement in the Eloge: "to say that sovereignty resides in the universality of the human race is to say that France is but a portion of that sovereignty,"²⁸ but now Carnot's meaning was both clearer and more political. The Mémoire stated that true "republican energy" is evident whenever people perceive the slightest danger to the Nation, and [that] energy is patriotic."²⁹ The battle cry of 1792--the Nation is in danger--would certainly

²⁶Reinhard, 1:130.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid., 1:78.

²⁹Ibid., 1:132.

unleash an outpouring of republican--and revolutionary--energy.

In the course of five years, from 1783 to the eve of the Revolution, Carnot established the bases for his political ideology through the means of four works, two of which were ostensibly technical engineering treatises, one which was a prize-winning literary essay, and one which was overtly political. Regardless of the forms in which they first appeared, Carnot's political preferences and his political aversions were firmly grounded. It remains to be seen how and if they changed during the next stages in Carnot's career.

III. DEPUTY AND *CONVENTIONNEL*

The Legislative Assembly

Shortly before the fall of the Bastille, Carnot was released from his brief imprisonment at Bethune, which had resulted from a *lettre de cachet* obtained by the disapproving father of a young lady Carnot had been courting. Carnot himself preferred to think that his imprisonment had more to do with the "jealousy and rancor" of the superior officers who disagreed with his outspoken partisanship of Montalembert's military principles of defensive warfare and the importance of fortresses over Guibert's more innovative emphasis on massed tactical forces whose role in Carnot's opinion seemed obviously offensive

rather than defensive.³⁰ Carnot's personal experience was indicative of the sentiments felt by most of the junior officers in the Royal Corps of Engineers--discontentment, bitterness and hostility towards the Ancien Régime in general and the situation in the Corps in particular. Ever practical, Carnot used his experience as the basis for an official "Protest against the Oppressive Régime under which the Engineering Corps is Governed," a copy of which he sent to the Constituent Assembly on 28 September 1789.³¹ Although he addressed the same protest to the Minister of War, La Tour de la Pin, in October, nothing was done with his ideas on an elected committee of officers to discuss fortifications or with his theories of fortifications themselves. Despite this setback, Carnot remained firm in his position, and it is worth noting that his preference for fortifications surfaced repeatedly throughout his career, culminating in his Défense des places fortes, written in 1810 at Napoleon's request.

Although he had no active role in government during the first two years of the Revolution, Carnot was not politically idle. He made extensive notes on army reforms, especially within the engineering corps, laying the groundwork for future opportunities. In a departure from

³⁰Dupre, p. 37.

³¹H. Carnot, 1:156.

military concerns, Carnot submitted a memorandum to the Constituent Assembly on 2 April 1790 proposing to pay off at least part of the nation's debt with "the goods of the clergy."³² Since his days at the engineering school at Mezières, Carnot had developed a tolerance for religious concepts based on the deism of the Enlightenment, while he retained a real antipathy towards the clergy and the established church. He suggested that the state take over all church lands, but not nationalize or quickly sell them. Carnot pointed out that the nationalized lands would flood an already unstable market and result in a sharp devaluation of property values. He warned further that if the state permitted long-term payments to be made in the newly-issued assignats, the purpose of solving the financial crisis, reducing the debt, and guaranteeing the value of the paper currency would be defeated. His proposal was not accepted, and events occurred as he feared they would.

The formal proposals which Carnot made and his informal ideas on the problems of national defense, economics and the military during 1789-1790 were not revolutionary. He inclined more towards the practical combination of traditional methods which he considered valid and innovations which would enhance those methods. To the moderates of 1790, Carnot might appear revolutionary, but to

³²Etienne Charavay, Correspondance générale de Carnot, 4 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1892-1907), 1:xv.

the radicals his views were conservative. These opposing perceptions would haunt Carnot's political career, and he would feel the need both during and after times of crisis to explain his position.

On the eve of his election to the Legislative Assembly in 1791, Carnot had established himself, at least in his own mind, as a reformer, an enemy of privilege and factions, an advocate of an as yet undefined republican form of government, and his adherence to these concepts would often be interpreted as intransigence. Carnot's political convictions and his actions resulting from them divided both his contemporaries and later historians. They seem to agree that his role in the Assembly and the Convention was without controversy, and an analysis of the speeches and reports Carnot made during this period confirms such a view. It is more to the point to discover how Carnot viewed his political career at its beginning, and his speeches indicate that he was continuing in public life the ideas he had expressed as an engineering officer.

In 1791 Carnot and his younger brother Feulint had joined both the revolution and the Society of the Friends of the Constitution in Aire, Pas-de-Calais. Carnot's participation in the Society was neither a formality nor a political expediency; he was elected the Society's first president and he used the club as a forum for the expression of his political ideals of equality of opportunity, an end

to privileges, and the necessity for political unity rather than factional divisions. Carnot thought that the concept of the general will was now being translated in practical terms into the sovereignty of the people through their new representative institutions and in the integrity of the new laws. He championed the idea of equality, of ability, and of the "finer attributes" patriotic men should possess. Above all, Carnot believed in the idea of liberty, but he rarely spoke of fraternity. He was not the "fraternal" type, given to written or oral expressions of generalized love of humanity, and his personal aloofness separated him as much from his close political colleagues as it did from the *sans-culottes*. If his views had an intellectual aura about them, that was hardly unique during those first years of freely-expressed republican and revolutionary rhetoric. Reinhard points out that the difference between empty rhetoric and political reality lay in Carnot's practical, mathematical nature and his proven ability to organize and transform ideas into actualities. Indeed, a unifying theme of his political career was a practical sort of bureaucracy which often rivaled his dedication to his ideals in its inflexibility. The very talented organizational administrator which Carnot proved to be, who usually worked behind the scenes and whose attachment to his specific set of ideals was neither inclined towards regular appearances behind the revolutionary podium nor interested in drawing

attention to himself. These tendencies kept Carnot's name out of the revolutionary annals until 1792. Hippolyte Carnot argues that this lack of personal recognition was not because his father had little of importance to contribute during those early years, as he says some historians claimed. It is more accurate to say, he continues, that Carnot would not leap into anything as new and as important as the Revolution without preparing for his debut as carefully and methodically as he had for his military career.

Carnot was elected a deputy for Pas-de-Calais as a result of his long association with that area, beginning in 1773, on various garrison duty assignments in Calais, Arras, Saint-Omer and Aire. Before he left for Paris, Carnot gave a farewell speech on 9 July 1791 to the Society of the Friends of the Constitution in Aire, of which he was president:

Your goal is to form public opinion in spreading love for the law, in reassuring our citizens that the fear of another revolution is nothing but the chimera which our enemies have fabricated...no government is more favorable than ours to liberty because it persecutes no one; in respecting all religious opinions we show that all religion is truly that of peace, of tolerance, taught by God himself...it is through tolerance of all that can be tolerated without compromising the constitution....We watch over the security of the law, but we are sentinels and not spies or inquisitors; we believe that true liberty is found only in obeying the law, for the first condition of freedom is to allow others to be free. The true friends of the Constitution should be severe with themselves alone and indulgent towards others. If among our members there are any who cannot rise to the heights of such a

belief, it is because they have been misled by zeal, and we must use our greatest efforts to lead them back to the spirit of tolerance and moderation demanded by the law.³³

Speeches such as this one were common enough at the time, and Carnot's differed from those of the more accomplished revolutionary orators only in his practical and usually unemotional insistence on the virtues of toleration, moderation, and obedience to the law. He was a rational man, after all, with a mathematically precise turn of mind which led him to recognize the necessity for strict adherence to the law "without compromise", and tolerance of the opinions of others. The idea of zeal also apparently concerned him, since a zealous nature ran counter to his rational principles, and an excess of zeal presaged divisiveness and loss of unity.

As a member of the Legislative Assembly during 1791-1792, Carnot, like many another novice deputy, was chiefly concerned with stabilizing the unwieldy political institutions created or drastically revised during those years, and with insuring that the new constitution functioned as it should. In the Assembly Carnot publicly supported the Constitution of 1791, which was a melange of old royalist traditions and new republican ideals, while he privately lamented its shortcomings. In spite of its imperfect nature, the document was still a powerful symbol

³³Reinhard, 1:183.

of the new order. "This is the nation," Carnot said, "which wants liberty, equality and the constitution complete, and which will not permit a single word to be erased, either through the force of arms or by the oblique views of convoluted politics."³⁴ Carnot's example for his position, his son explains, was Benjamin Franklin, the "leader of the democratic opposition" in the United States, who had disapproved in principle of his own constitution but who had given it his public approval rather than encourage factionalism.

The Committee of Public Instruction seems an odd place to assign a military engineer, but Carnot became a member of this body in September 1791. He believed he had something to offer the committee and, through it, the nation. Carnot used his obvious skills in reorganizing the committee and its tasks into four divisions, and attached himself to the division charged with developing the best system of public instruction.³⁵ His philosophical belief in education had been expressed in Le Pouvoir de l'habitude; education is necessary, he argued, because man is not born naturally good, and both customs and formal instruction are required to teach citizens morality and virtue.³⁶ His practical

³⁴H. Carnot, 1:187.

³⁵Ibid., 1:199.

³⁶Carnot, p. 139.

experience on the committee later appeared as part of his report to the Convention in January 1793:

Citizens, we have seldom written to you without speaking of the need for public instruction--this need cries out with the greatest impatience. A generation follows us whom education has abandoned for three years; the longer this situation continues, the less they will enjoy the benefits of liberty. Already new prejudices are replacing those we destroyed. You see citizens of good faith now believing that intolerance and harshness must be the distinctive characteristics of the true republican. [The latter] freely treats anyone who enjoys the pleasures of friendship and domestic virtues as enemies of the Revolution; [he] learns how to become savage, teaches his children to judge other citizens' degree of patriotism only by the degree of terror that it inspires....National education is the means to destroy these unfortunate impressions which, if left unchecked, will make France into a horde of savages....³⁷

This excerpt demonstrates that Carnot thought education had a political as well as an intellectual function, and it also repeats his preference for moderate and reasonable political views. These views would later contrast with those of Danton, Robespierre and Saint-Just, who Carnot thought exemplified a savage fanaticism, regardless of political affiliation, which was incompatible with being a true republican who was virtuous without being extreme, and who was committed to unity rather than to factionalism. Even during the Hundred Days, as Minister of the Interior, Carnot outlined a comprehensive plan for public education, which was an amplification of his earlier work on the Committee of

³⁷Tissot, p. 210.

Public Instruction, but unfortunately circumstances did not permit its implementation.

On 8 November 1791, Carnot made his first speech to the Assembly, as part of the general debate concerning the emigré princes and the legislation proposed against them. As much as he detested the nobility and its privileges, Carnot thought the emigrés were much worse--in his opinion, they betrayed their country. No other evidence was necessary to convict them of treason, and Carnot's speech addressed this specific point:

The constitution did not insist that you [the Assembly] must have legal proof in order to accuse someone; if such had been its intention, it would have made you a tribunal instead. It is enough that you have a moral conviction of wrong-doing to issue a decree of accusation. Which of you doubts that those French princes are not guilty, who have placed themselves at the head of the armed revolt? Whosoever abandons his mother country in favor of her enemies is a traitor against whom you cannot be too harsh. The princes have forfeited the good name of Frenchmen, which now more than ever, they should have had reason to honor.³⁸

In addition to the general consensus to outlaw the emigré princes, Carnot proposed that all emigré officers be immediately replaced by commissioned and non-commissioned officers who were obviously loyal to the Revolution. Before the legislation could be enacted, Louis XVI vetoed it on 12 November, which was not unexpected, but the issue of the emigrés was not concluded, either in the Assembly or in Carnot's mind. As a representative-on-mission to the camp

³⁸H. Carnot, 1:194.

at Soissons the first week of August 1792, Carnot mentioned at the conclusion of his report to the Assembly that the "machinations of the emigrés and the excesses of [their] fanaticism" continued to provoke outbreaks of violence.³⁹ The Moniteur, which printed portions of Carnot's report, noted that the deputies expressed dismay at the mention of emigré activities.⁴⁰ The idea which Carnot expressed concerning the sufficiency of a moral conviction of guilt to accuse would also continue to be the philosophy of the Assembly and then the Convention, although it would receive its widest interpretation through the Committee of Public Safety. Carnot would himself eventually know how it felt to be on the other side of the Convention's moral convictions.

The Constitution of 1791, the document which Carnot believed should never lose a single word by any means, was in his opinion the expression of the new government's legitimacy. To that end, he believed in its future and in the future of an even more liberal government--he actually wanted France to become a republic--and one of his major concerns was to prevent any weaknesses from diluting the constitution's legitimacy. Small concessions, he argued, would lead inevitably to significant compromises and the interests of a few rather than the welfare of all. In a

³⁹Charavay, 1:23.

⁴⁰Dupre, p. 45.

letter to the Minister of the Interior, Carnot said "You realize that one abuse, one concession leads to another, and you also know that the former government's concessions are precisely what produced the frightful disorder which led to the Revolution."⁴¹ To permit changes in the document which validated the Revolution was to impede the progress of the Revolution, and such a possibility must be avoided. Carnot also thought that individual interests would be the first to seek concessions, thereby undermining the whole which the constitution was intended to protect. He had recognized the strength of individual or private interests in contrast to the public good, and in Le Pouvoir he had asked how an individual could incorporate his personal interests into the general interest, and find happiness in virtue and pleasure in duty. Such an incorporation was necessary for both the individual and society, Carnot believed, and customs, moral laws and education would make it possible. Good habits make good citizens, he wrote, and moral education is a required part of the process.⁴² Without morality, private interests would dominate society and destroy the public good; and in politics, private interests were nothing more than factions.

1792 was an important year for Carnot, although Reinhard and Hippolyte Carnot interpret its significance

⁴¹Reinhard, 1:208.

⁴²Carnot, p. 139.

differently. To Reinhard it is the period which proved conclusively that Carnot had an amazing gift for organization and meticulous attention to detail which successfully made the transition from a military to a political career, first with the Committee of Public Instruction and then, more importantly, with the Military Committee. Reinhard credits the organizational talent to Carnot's engineering training, and says that "like technicians in general," Carnot was more concerned with the "administration of things rather than the government of people."⁴³ Reinhard's assessment seems to be at odds with Carnot's professed belief in the general will and the sovereignty of the people as the "principle of and the justification for a republic," the only form of government which was the expression of the general will, and whose laws must benefit everyone. Certainly Carnot was a technician, but he was also one who used that quality to nurture and to preserve the gains of the Revolution for the citizens and the Nation.

In 1792 Carnot also told the Convention: "I am a military man; I speak very little, and I do not wish to belong to any faction,"⁴⁴ thereby establishing the precedent, according to Hippolyte Carnot, for the "moderate

⁴³Reinhard, 1:215.

⁴⁴H. Carnot, 1:175.

and reasonable course" which he would follow through each successive phase of the Revolution. Carnot had never been favorable towards clubs--his own formal association with the Society of the Friends of the Constitution was short-lived--and he agreed with Rousseau that clubs usually stirred up more issues than they settled. Political factions as outgrowths of the clubs were detrimental to both the ideals of the Revolution and the work of the Convention itself, and Carnot kept away from such divisiveness as much as possible. A moderate and reasonable course, charted through periods which were becoming increasingly chaotic, might be considered politically safe but unrealistic, if one is committed to the progress of the Revolution, as Carnot clearly was. But he was not inflexibly moderate either, says Hippolyte Carnot, for "when the moderate course became stationary, Carnot moved ahead with the others who moved on, to the next phase [of the Revolution]."⁴⁵

Although he did not yet have any official military position, Carnot returned to the subject he knew best and proposed to the Assembly on 3 January 1792 that the fortress at Perpignan be destroyed. He had two reasons for his proposal--the citadel was not suited for defense in the way that Vauban's fortresses along the northern frontiers were, and it had been used occasionally as a prison. The latter

⁴⁵H. Carnot, 1:181

reason concerned Carnot the most, for the possibility existed that officers less devoted to revolutionary principles might incarcerate patriots in the citadel. Behind this concern was Carnot's remembrance of his brief imprisonment in a similar citadel. His address to the Assembly, which would not agree to his proposal, expressed his military and political views:

I would not have believed that by proposing the destruction of a bastille to the Frenchmen of 1792 I could be so poorly received. I entered the military service as an engineer twenty years ago; I am not speaking to you from ignorance. If I have brought any feeling to this Assembly, it is above all a love for liberty and a hatred of tyrants. I ask that all bastilles in the kingdom be destroyed--are not the Frenchmen of 92 the same as those of 89?⁴⁶

Pas-de-Calais returned Carnot to the new Convention on 6 September 1792, and when the Convention met, it elected twenty-four members to serve on the military committee. Carnot headed the list of members, and his position on the committee and his extensive missions throughout France restricted his role as a deputy and his actual presence in the Convention for most of the year. When he returned to Paris in January 1793, Carnot presented the commission's report on what its members had observed in the Pyrenees, but these observations were only a portion of the report. The specific problems encountered in the Pyrenees and the proposed solutions were applicable to virtually any region

⁴⁶H. Carnot, 1:196.

in France; Carnot pointed out that the proposed solutions would end the civil administration's shortcomings in the departments and facilitate their reorganization and the subsequent spread of republican ideals. Carnot's political thoughts are clearly expressed in this report, which ostensibly concerns military matters but which he uses as a political forum of sorts.

Citizens, it time for you to consider the true elements of the people's welfare. You know the spirit--above all, good and confident...it loves the republic because its deepest feelings tell it that those it has chosen for its representatives, those whose interests are united with its own, should be dearer to it than those who, without ceasing to mislead and abuse, believe they possess a superior nature. Sacrifices alone do not make the people worthy of the Revolution; let us also sacrifice for it our individual passions. The people are always ready to follow the impetus which we have given them; they want only to go forward together, and we believe that they can readily distinguish between those who honestly support them and those who are nothing more than deceitful schemers or ambitious agitators.⁴⁷

The Convention ordered this report printed and made public. The actual presence of the ideals of the sovereignty of the people and their ability to unite within a representative government, their dedication to the principles of liberty and equality, and their inability to be fooled by any enemy of those principles were the outcome of four months of field work. The government was not perfect, as Carnot observed, and the constitution of 1791 would be laid aside and a new one drafted. Although Carnot

⁴⁷Tissot, p. 212.

had pledged his loyalty to the constitution of 1791, he was perfectly willing to work towards a new one which he expected would correct the weaknesses of the old. He concluded the commission's report on that subject:

If the great fault of the constitution was that it permitted the independence and rivalry of powers, and if this fault would of necessity produce a new revolution because its principle was to divide everything, perhaps we will find then that the new constitution will reunite everything...it is much less in the limiting of the extent of the power of authorities than in the abridging of their duration that we will avoid despotism. The rotation of officials, the election of magistrates...the publicizing of decisions--these are the safeguards of liberty and the true guarantee of the republic's welfare.⁴⁸

Carnot's real intention here was to eliminate the provisional executive council, which he thought was beset by factions, and replace it with committees under the Convention's authority. He would have to wait until 1794, however, before the Convention adopted without comment the same proposal he presented in the name of the Committee of Public Safety.

The Convention enacted the decree of 15 December 1792, which instituted the virtual dictatorship of revolutionaries in any nation that expressed a desire for liberty and the principles of the Revolution; this dictatorship would have the support of the republican armies, and Carnot saw no conflict between such action and his opposition to any

⁴⁸Tissot, p. 214.

military offensives. The armies would not be acquiring territory, but rather they would be defenders of liberty wherever it was to be found.

The law of 15 December engages the honor of the French nation to protect the liberty of all people who desire it; the law gives to all those who recognize the Rights of Man the right to our assistance; it makes of them our natural allies. Nations are in the political order the same as individuals are in the social order: they have respective rights, which are independence, security without and unity within, [and] national honor....⁴⁹

It was only a short step from leading people to the benefits of liberty and equality by example to annexing them to the republic in order to guarantee them those benefits. As a member of the Convention's diplomatic committee during the first part of 1793, Carnot prepared a report at the request of the Committee of General Security on the incorporation of Monaco and other states into the republic. The decree of 15 December provided the theoretical bases for these incorporations. Carnot thought that the two critical truths in any political system were interests and the nation: "everything is reduced to these," he wrote, "for they are part of the natural law and are therefore composed of all the rights of peoples and are the basis of both individual morality and the morality of nations".⁵⁰ He continued:

⁴⁹Charavay, 1:364.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 1:365.

I can therefore conclude...by these two general maxims which clearly establish in politics the difference between justice and injustice:

1. All political measures are legitimate as long as they are required by the welfare of the State;
2. All acts which harm the interests of others without indispensable necessity to oneself are unjust.

I apply these maxims to any reunions, separations and changes of territory, and I show as a comparison this principle which reinforces the entire theory of these principles: no reunion, augmentation, diminution or change of any kind of territory can take place anywhere in the Republic without recognizing first, that no change is contrary to the interest of the state and second, that the communes which desire this change ask for it freely and formally, or that the general security of the Republic makes it indispensable.⁵¹

Carnot believed the principles he had outlined had their origins in the 15 December decree, but they were also based on the sort of humanitarian nationalism which was part of the Enlightenment's legacy, and to which Carnot still adhered. It would soon be replaced by a much narrower definition of nationalism, and the two maxims on justice would underline much of the Committee of Public Safety's work.

Carnot incorporated the question of interests into his Declaration of the Rights of Citizens, which he prepared in February 1793 at the request of the Convention's constitutional committee; his proposal was only one of several submitted. Carnot's Declaration outlined twenty-two

⁵¹Charavay, 1:366.

rights and obligations, and these were preceded by a lengthy explanatory preamble, the whole of which Carnot read to the Convention on 10 March. The question of interests was interpreted within the context of a social pact which "is the tacit convention which forms the basis of every society, regardless of its constitution or its particular [political] organization...it assures advantages and imposes obligations...and each [person] should aid others as much as he can without harming his own interests, and no one should harm the interests of others unless it is necessary for himself."⁵² Although Carnot thought that the general interest should supersede individual interests, this was part of his more flexible ideology, and in the specific case of the Declaration, it is possible to see Carnot's willingness to modify his original idea. His Declaration with its melange of Enlightenment political and social concepts was not adopted, but his basic idea of individual interest and general interest expressed earlier in *Le Pouvoir* was loosely incorporated into the Declaration adopted by the Convention on 23 June 1793, as Article VI: "Liberty is the power which is man's obligation to do all that is not contrary to the rights of others; its principle is nature, its rule is justice, its safeguard the law; its

⁵²Charavay, 1:403.

moral limit is this maxim: do not do to another that which you do not want him to do to you."⁵³

The Convention dealt with the issue of the king's fate in January 1793; the debates had been going on, however, since August of the previous year. Carnot voted for death on 17 January, saying that in his opinion "justice wills that Louis should die, and politics wills it equally. I have never had anything weigh on my conscience as much as this, but I think that in order to prove your belief in the laws of equality, and to prove that ambitions do not frighten you, you must strike down the tyrant. I vote for death."⁵⁴ During the first restoration, Carnot laid the responsibility for Louis XVI's death on the emigrés; their treason had turned the entire nation against the king. "There are inflexible duties in politics as there are in revolutions," he wrote in 1814, "and the first of these is never to deliver one's country into the hands of foreigners, even though they offer to support, with their armies, the [political] system they believe is the best."⁵⁵ Carnot never appeared to regret his role as regicide, because he honestly believed that the situation at the time permitted no other course of action.

⁵³Charavay, 1:404.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 1:349.

⁵⁵Reinhard, 2:26.

In every country one condemns those who conspire against the state. Do not sovereigns put to death those who conspire against them? Do not the people, who are the true sovereign, have that same right? The situation had reached the point where either the king perished, or the Convention did, and France with it. The good paid for the deeds of the wicked, [and] the worst causes had their martyrs the same as the best ones. Louis XVI committed the greatest crime a king could be guilty of--that of betraying his country to foreigners. In spite of that, he could perhaps have been saved if the Convention had not had to deliberate under the threat of his swords.⁵⁶

By the middle of 1793 a crucial stage in Carnot's political career had ended; the ideology formulated ten years earlier had coalesced into definitive political action, and the labels of "regicide" and "*conventionnel*" were firmly attached. However, his views were becoming more difficult to classify in terms of the existing political ideologies--moderate, radical or conservative, Girondin or Jacobin--though Carnot would probably have denounced any such convenient classification. On repeated occasions he spoke against factions, and he refused to consider himself part of any one of them. He spoke of moderation, though he would later say there was no such thing as a "moderate" political party; his adamant rejection of privilege and unjust social distinctions placed him closer to the radicals; and his belief in the rights of property--though not as a prerequisite for universal suffrage--was a more bourgeois conservative opinion. His commitment to the

⁵⁶H. Carnot, 1:293.

inevitability and necessity of the war followed the Girondins' view, but his opposition to their leniency towards Louis XVI placed him with the Jacobins. In the months to come, he would continue to refuse to identify with any party, just as he had done from the beginning; instead he would be considered too moderate for some and too radical for others. However varied the political labels might be, it is more important to understand that Carnot honestly believed that his opinions could not be conveniently categorized. Though they had elements of all, they owed allegiance to none.

Organizing Victory

The most enduring of the ideas which Carnot presented in the Eloge de Vauban is his condemnation of military rank by virtue of birth and fortune, an idea which he never abandoned throughout the vicissitudes of governments and his own political career. From his days at the engineering school at Mezières, Carnot had observed inequality firsthand, as his bourgeois status overshadowed his talent and allowed him no higher rank than captain. Inequality existed among the Ancien Régime officer corps in the length of service required to earn promotions, in the pay scale, and even among the branches of the service, where "the engineering corps is treated worse than any." Carnot would not forget this sort of inequality, and during the winter of

1789-1790 when he began his first work on army reorganization, translating the ideas of 1784 into practice, he devised the "elective principle" to guarantee that his nemesis, the aristocratic officers, would fall victim to his convictions of equality. "The only definite reforming idea Carnot had,"⁵⁷ Palmer says, but the ideas that "the soldier is to the military what the people are to the Nation," and that all ranks would be open to men of talent would have an amazing impact on the fledgling republican armies.

The Eloge contained another principle from which Carnot would not deviate--the principle which explained that the art of war was not to conquer but to defend, and more especially to protect "civilization threatened." Carnot believed as Vauban did in the "defense of places," and that fortifications along the natural and political frontiers of France were all that was necessary. This idea worked well along the northern frontier where Vauban's fortresses made such defense practical. However, "defense" took on an entirely different meaning in the hands of Bonaparte and the Army of Italy, and Carnot was powerless to change it.

Because he was essentially practical and rarely based his opinions on anything which he had not observed for himself--all the authors cited agree on this point--Carnot's views on equality of opportunity were limited to what he

⁵⁷Palmer, p. 8.

understood the best, which was the army. In modern terms, his solution to inequality is referred to as "Affirmative Action." Men of talent--military, scientific, mathematical--should advance because of their talents; they were, in Carnot's opinion, part of the new social order which the Revolution was creating, a social order which ignored rank by virtue of birth and privilege. Carnot believed that the Ancien Régime was condemned by its scornful attitude toward merit and its classification of people according to their birth and wealth alone. In contrast, the Revolution gave the "lumières" a place in the first ranks of the new order.

The ci-devant aristocrats lost out in Carnot's reorganization, but since equality is a two-edged sword, problems arose in the army. The void left by the departing aristocrat-officers was filled by "men of talent" whose promotion to general officers and colonels was based on what they were likely to achieve rather than what they had already learned through practical military experience. Before the Revolution, most of them, including Carnot, could not advance beyond a certain rank; but by the middle of 1793, sergeants became lieutenants, lieutenants became colonels, colonels became generals, all in short order and most without benefit of comprehensive military training. Carnot understood the problem of talent without command experience, but he counted on a combination of patriotism and the new graduates of the egalitarian military schools to

carry them through. As Reinhard points out, equality promoted men whose military talent was never in doubt, but some of these talented men were also, to Carnot's dismay, "rapacious, ambitious and bragging."⁵⁸

Many of these problems could have been avoided early on if Carnot had bothered to heed the advice of experienced republican generals like Jourdan and Kellermann, whose military talent and politics were above reproach. More to the point, Phipps continues, many of the problems resulted from Carnot's "war office clerk" mentality, which prevented him from understanding why the soldier in the field sees things differently from the man in the Ministry of War.⁵⁹

Nevertheless, the worst abuses of the Ancien Régime--the entrenched caste system, the stultifying routine, the passiveness of the rank and file--disappeared as the new spirit of equality and allegiance to "the Nation" infused life into the armies. The beginning of a "truly national army", which Carnot had envisioned in 1788, the "elective principle" of 1790, and the volunteer battalions of 1792 would guarantee success, or so Carnot believed.

Reinhard attributes much importance to the conditions which followed the departure of the aristocratic officers, because he says that Carnot was disillusioned with the first

⁵⁸Reinhard, 1:202.

⁵⁹Phipps, 1:259.

results of his reorganization--the gap between the ideal and the reality was too wide. It might be overstating the case to speak of disillusionment; Hippolyte Carnot insists that all went just as his father conceived it--surely an exaggeration--while Phipps says that Carnot's strategical and tactical concepts with their emphasis on defensive actions were not compatible with either the revolutionary armies or military success. Granting the fact that Carnot held firm to his principles where the army was concerned, it may also be said that he was practical enough to realize that reform of an antiquated, caste-ridden body could not take place overnight. The men of talent were largely untried in command, but when the situation required it, they would rise to the occasion by virtue of that talent and their revolutionary zeal. Carnot knew this from the beginning, his son says, because of his faith in the citizen as soldier. On this one point Phipps agrees, but perhaps because he is tracking the careers of the twenty-six future Napoleonic marshals, those talented men who would astonish a great many people by just how fast and how high they rose. Unfortunately, he refuses to credit Carnot for making any of it possible. If at the beginning the volunteers were an unruly, undisciplined lot, they had a patriotism which could not be taught, and through Carnot's system of amalgamation with existing line units, they would be trained and steadied. Events proved his assumptions to be valid, and

Carnot had little reason to be disillusioned, nor had he been forced to compromise his principles.

By the middle of 1792 there was no need to create a situation where the armies could logically--and legally--defend revolutionary principles against foreign intervention, as Carnot realized they must do, for the coalitions had already provided such a situation. On 19 January 1792, Carnot wrote that "the destiny of the Revolution will lie with war; it is simply a matter of defending our liberty."⁶⁰ On the eve of the declaration of war, Carnot's speech before the Assembly was neither an attempt to justify war nor a panegyric for the French initiative. Rather it was a stern reminder that the enemy's ranks were filled with traitorous emigrés who threatened not only the nation's frontiers but also the Revolution itself. Victory alone would preserve both, and the army--Carnot's reorganized, untried and undisciplined servant and defender of the imperfect republic--was sent out to achieve the nearly impossible.

Reinhard thinks that victory was Carnot's primary goal, not as the obvious end in itself but as proof that his confidence in the republican armies as defender of the republic was not misplaced. Victory up to a point, Hippolyte Carnot adds, because this truly national army of

⁶⁰Reinhard, 1:209.

his father's would not be permitted aggressive action beyond the natural frontiers of France unless--and that was a very important qualifier--such action was necessary to forestall invasion. It was never Carnot's intention to use the army to spread forcefully and on its own initiative the revolutionary gospel; he thought there were better means for that purpose than the military.

The work that went into the task of organizing victory was formidable. Reinhard is impressed with the coordination between scientists and technicians, between generals and commissaires, between armies and representatives-on-mission, between citizens and soldiers, all of which Carnot orchestrated. Reinhard acknowledges that Carnot understood from the earliest days of the Revolution that the "birth of [this] national army would guarantee the emancipation of the nation."⁶¹ Emancipation is what the Revolution had to achieve, Hippolyte Carnot agrees, because it was "necessary, legitimate, almost sacred," and radical reforms, among which Carnot included army reorganization, were one means to insure emancipation. But being "essentially a man of order,"⁶² Carnot believed more in the peaceful progress toward that end, after victory was a fact, of course. Dupre and Phipps understand the organization and the victory, but

⁶¹Reinhard, 1:209.

⁶²H. Carnot, 1:294.

they fail to understand the ideology behind either. Lefebvre comments that the organization of victory was a group effort rather than the work of an individual, and to a point he is correct. Nevertheless, he concedes that for history, Carnot will always be "the man of the Year Two."⁶³

There is a corollary to Carnot's dedication to the armies of the Republic which, in Reinhard's estimation, acted as an additional deterrent to what might easily have become unbridled militarism in less responsible, practical and idealistic hands. This deterrent was Carnot's fear of the "Caesar complex," of a strong sword interfering in political matters and attempting to dominate them. Other members of the Committee of Public Safety wrestled with this problem, though perhaps not for the same reasons as Carnot. It is interesting to note that by the time he was serving as a Director, Carnot realized that a strong and successful general, Caesar-like or not, was necessary to save the Republic. Reinhard points out that although he had not compromised his principles by thinking this at the time, Carnot had opened the door for the political reality of 18 Brumaire. This reality became first the Consulate and then the Empire; and after casting the only dissenting vote

⁶³Georges Lefebvre, Review of Reinhard's *Le grand Carnot* in *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* (1953): 88.

against the Empire, Carnot left France in voluntary exile rather than remain and compromise.

The conception of Carnot locked away in an office for most of the Revolution, surrounded by maps, diagrams of strategical maneuvers, troop rosters and other arcane paraphernalia of war is a popular one, but it is not accurate. In the first place, Carnot was highly visible as a commissioner to the Army of the North, and as a representative-on-mission from the Pyrenees to the Rhine; he spent as much time in the field as he did in his offices. In the second place, the enormous task of restructuring a hybrid army composed of a few former royalist officers and a lot of new republican ones who commanded the untrained volunteer battalions was scarcely a solitary occupation. The organization of victory was a committee activity, especially during 1793; Carnot was in charge and most of the innovative ideas were his, but he certainly had competent assistance. In the last place, Carnot did not consider the reorganization to be solely for military purposes, since the armies served the crucial political function of defending both the Revolution's goals and the revolutionary identity of France against the forces of tyranny.

Carnot misjudged himself when he said he was purely military, for his speeches, reports and activities show otherwise; they contained too many philosophical and political elements for his disclaimer to be valid. It is

true, however, that he was more a military man than a politician, in the accepted sense of the term, but he clearly wanted to adapt military practices and doctrines to the new revolutionary situation.⁶⁴ His military ideas were tied too closely to the political realities which had touched him directly and to the ideologies which he had formulated earlier for them to be considered as separate entities. For instance, Carnot's views on the high command and cadres in general can be explained in terms of his long-standing resentment of the "feudal temperament" and the oppression within the engineering corps, while his opposition to certain fortified places was based more on his distrust of the ci-devant royalist officers who commanded them than on their strategical insignificance.⁶⁵

Therefore, the organization of victory contained as much of Carnot's political ideas as it did of his exceptional practical abilities, and it owed most of its success to his assessment of the strategical political situation as well as his assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of military strategy. "I was not limited to just the military side; I combined that role with a little of the

⁶⁴Reinhard, 1:212.

⁶⁵Ibid., 1:213.

moralist and a little of the administrator,"⁶⁶ Carnot said later, and he was right.

Carnot's argument that a declaration of war expressed the necessity to save the Revolution's accomplishments agreed with the Girondist view, but as usual he refused to ally himself with that view; he thought that defending liberty transcended party labels. A month later he proposed the "levée en masse", wherein all male citizens between the ages of 20 and 25 were called up to serve. Carnot's opinion of the origins of the inevitable conflict was also that of the majority of the deputies: "The war...will not come because of [us]; it will come because a coalition of kings oppose liberty."⁶⁷ When war was declared on 19 April, Carnot told the Assembly "you will have the love of country and the ideals of liberty; the enemy will have nothing to oppose this with but [an army of] slaves and automatons."⁶⁸

With war declared and the armies to be gotten ready, Carnot had precise ideas on how the job should be done. If the army were to succeed against odds that he knew were less than favorable, Carnot insisted that in addition to a new military strategy, a new military doctrine was essential. His first target in paving the way for this new doctrine was

⁶⁶Charavay, 1:380.

⁶⁷Ibid., 1:178.

⁶⁸Ibid., 1:214.

what he considered a dangerous holdover from the Ancien Régime--the tradition of a soldier's passive obedience towards the commands of his superior officer. "Despotism was founded on this same [principle of] passive obedience," Carnot told the Assembly in April. "I cannot understand how anyone dared, in this temple of liberty [the Assembly], to propose to you the principles of passive obedience and military triumphs--those two most powerful means of destroying freedom."⁶⁹ He continued by saying that an army which obeys through reason will always defeat one which obeys blindly; there is a middle ground between passive obedience to unreasonable orders on the one hand, and undisciplined refusal on the other. That middle point--reasoning obedience--is what distinguishes a man from a charging beast.⁷⁰ The next two years under fire would prove that Carnot's idea was correct and, if anything, the republican soldier of 1792-1794 erred on the side of mutiny rather than of passivity; the massacre of General Dillon by his own troops is a drastic case in point.

When he was on mission, Carnot addressed the armies in political terms as often as he outlined strategy; the soldiers were never to forget that they were defenders of their liberty and protectors of the liberty of others.

⁶⁹Reinhard, 1:216.

⁷⁰Ibid.

Theirs was not a war of conquest but of preservation, and if the generals seemed about to forget these principles, Carnot reminded them that their actions would give the enemy every pretext to publicly castigate the ideals of the Revolution.

Remember, soldiers, that the first of your titles is that of citizen; do not be more of a menace to our country than the enemy itself. [The enemy] knows that the republic cannot exist without virtue, and they want to choke that virtue through the intrigues of their emissaries. We leave to them the spirit of rapine and cupidity, while we honor the civic virtues even more than the military ones, so that the weak and oppressed will see you as a force to be emulated. Old people, women, children, farmers, peaceful men of all lands are our brothers; we must defend them and their property as we would defend our own. Even in despotic times this has been the credo of the French soldier, and now, with even greater reason it should be that of the soldiers of the republic.⁷¹

Carnot did not take the early successes of the reorganized armies for granted, nor was he dismayed by the setbacks; there was room for improvement in both situations. Victory convinced him that the republic was the only government possible, and that the victories of 1792-1793 proved that royalty was discredited throughout France. "We want an absolutely new and absolutely popular form of government," he said; "the Convention cannot choose between different forms of governments--it must organize a republic."⁷² As necessary as victory was to preserve the Revolution, there was the danger of complacency inherent in

⁷¹Tissot, p. 217.

⁷²Reinhard, 1:306.

continued successes. Carnot realized that danger and brought it to the Army of the North's attention on 9 March 1793:

Liberty, which has been appeased by success, awakens to the voice of danger, and this awakening is a triumph. The victories of this campaign will make up for the checks...you must listen to the songs of glory and return to your posts--they are anywhere that the republic is threatened. Citizens, the people suffer from this protracted struggle between liberty and despotism, between armies and [their] country. The destiny of despotism is certain--it shall perish...hasten its last hour, make peace only with those who are free and without kings, and prepare for universal peace.⁷³

Carnot strongly believed in a citizenry armed against all enemies of the republic, whether they were foreigners and emigrés outside or counter-revolutionaries inside. His idea was not a new one, and he acknowledged the tradition in his report on the fabrication of pikes presented to the Assembly of 1 August 1792. In spite of the tradition, Carnot expressed some rather revolutionary views on the subject, most notably that the use of pikes would "make every citizen a soldier [and] deliver the last blow to the spirit of distinction by the annihilation of this last and dreadful profession known as the line army."⁷⁴ Although Carnot was characteristically precise in outlining the exact specifications of pikes, where they should be manufactured and for how much, his proposal also shows the continuity of

⁷³Reinhard, 2:37.

⁷⁴Charavay, 1:410.

his principles and the integration of the political with the military.

Carnot explained that there were not enough weapons in France, nor had there been for some time, for all citizens to be armed; meanwhile their property, their lives and their liberty was being threatened from all sides. "We have declared that the nation is in danger, and not a single significant action has yet been taken...it a truth which ought to be patently obvious to anyone at all who wants to see that the governments which surround us want us destroyed, [that] there are those who speak to us of friendship the better to fool us, and that right now we have no other political course to follow except to be the strongest."⁷⁵ Carnot went on to mention Rousseau's concept of the citizen-soldier as one of the justifications for his proposal, and amplified that concept further by saying that the troops of the line should become the troops of the national guard, that everyone would follow the same military regimen, receive the same pay, and wear the same uniform. The last artificial division between soldier-citizen and citizen soldier would disappear. He concluded the "political" portion of his proposal by saying that "nothing will be simpler than this new military system, nothing will

⁷⁵Charavay, 1:411.

be stronger or more economical, and more in conformance with the spirit of the constitution."⁷⁶

The proposal therefore concerns far more than the organization of a citizens' army and the specification of pikes with which to arm it; it is a call for unity, a reminder of the principles of the Revolution, and the necessity of preserving a republic beset by the forces of despotism and inequality.

If war is to be declared, it is thus that each one will perceive it as the price of liberty, that he will see the miracles which the love of country produces; particular interests disappear, everything shall unite in this great and unique common interest--the nation's welfare. The appeal of equality will unite us all; wealth is of no importance, for talent and virtue alone matter, and we will never again share the lies and ridicule of schemers.⁷⁷

Victory in spite of the daunting odds which existed in 1792-1793 could not be guaranteed by organizational talent alone; something more intangible than that was necessary. Carnot was credited with providing the technical and tactical skills which, together with his innovations, contributed to the victories of Valmy and Wattignies, for example--victories which showed the powers that opposed republican France that the Revolution must be taken seriously, and as an accomplished fact, at least on the battlefield. The propaganda value of the undisciplined and

⁷⁶Charavay, 1:411.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 1:412.

unorthodox revolutionary armies defeating the aristocratic inheritors of Frederick the Great's military maxims was not lost on either Carnot or the Convention. Valmy did not avenge Rossbach, but it was a definite beginning. The ideas Carnot expressed during the time when he held virtually unlimited authority over military concerns--July 1792 to July 1793--were not unique, but the combination of those ideas with his extraordinary capacity for long hours and endless details earned him the sobriquet of "Organizer of Victory." However much one might dispute the degree of Carnot's responsibility, few can argue with either the immediate results of his efforts or the climate which he created.

IV. THE COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC SAFETY

"A government revolutionary until the peace"

Carnot was notified on 6 August 1793 that he would become one of the twelve members of the newly-created Committee of Public Safety, and he was formally elected on the 14th. As yet, the Committee had no one with military experience. Only members of the Convention could be considered for the Committee of Public Safety, and "few members of the Convention were soldiers by profession."⁷⁸ There were only two, Carnot and Prieur de la Côte d'Or, both

⁷⁸Palmer, p. 41.

engineering officers, and both were selected. If his political career as deputy to the Assembly and as *conventionnel* seemed straightforward and without controversy, if his multi-faceted activities and his role as the "organizer of victory" were applauded by almost everyone, and if his political ideology remained true to the foundations upon which he based it, Carnot was now about to enter a period of his career that would bring nothing but controversy. His role would be widely debated, and he would discover, like the other members of the Committee, that he possessed virtually unlimited power, although that power was ill-defined in a formal sense. Nevertheless, Carnot rarely if ever acted out of character, and even the most revolutionary measures he undertook on behalf of the Committee, which were dictated by extreme circumstances, continued to have as their basis the preservation of those principles in which he had always believed, and the abolition of those remnants of despotism which violated his principles.

Carnot had never been a politician, and his membership on that most political of committees would not make him one. When he had to defend himself after Thermidor for his actions during the Terror, he created the distinction between the committee members who were "workers"--himself, Lindet, and Prieur de la Côte d'Or--and those who were "politicians"--Robespierre, Saint-Just, Couthon and the

rest. However, during the first months of the Committee's existence, before it became a "government revolutionary until the peace," Carnot sided with Robespierre more often than not in order to reinforce the Committee's solidarity and to facilitate the goals of the republic.⁷⁹

It is useful to note at this point the observations of Tissot, who wrote about Carnot thirty years after the fall of the Committee, and who had seen the Terror first-hand. Tissot describes Carnot as sincerely attached to the constitution, which he attempted to support with all his abilities, but also blinded by his own prejudices at the same time he attacked the prejudices of others. His hostility towards injustice in general often made him judgmental towards those in particular who failed to share his point of view. He was a poor judge of many dangerous and politically controversial actions which appeared either reprehensible or at least patently unwise to even the least clairvoyant observer. Although no one had purer intentions than Carnot, Tissot believes, his intentions were hampered by his lack of a perceptive political stance. Carnot's belief in his own personal integrity and the inviolability of his ideals also gave a certain obstinacy to his mistakes.⁸⁰

⁷⁹Reinhard, 2:84.

⁸⁰Tissot, p. xxiv.

There is a certain validity to Tissot's assessment, for he had known Carnot, though not well, and he had seen first hand the events of the Revolution, the Empire and the restoration in which Carnot had participated. Tissot also wrote the year after Carnot died in exile, before either the legend of the "Organizer of Victory" or the "austere republican" became integral components of Carnot's political persona, and Tissot is therefore more able to project a certain objectivity which some later historians do not.

In speaking for himself at the outset of his tenure on the Committee, Carnot said "In revolutionary times, you almost always find yourself having to choose between the lesser of two evils."⁸¹ He also spoke about the hazards of adopting an independent political position, which in his opinion was not in accordance with the revolutionary principles of unity and equality, and which would surely lead to dangerous aberrations:

The role of an independent, so appealing at the beginning of a political career, is nearly always perilous, without usefulness to anyone, and too often it serves as a mask for cowardice; the worst ideas take refuge there in order to mislead public opinion....All parties have their independents as well as their moderates, but there is no such thing as a party of moderation, although this label has often been applied. A party such as this, in its struggle with other parties to insure the dominance of its moderate ideas, becomes just as violent as the rest. Don't look for such a party...in revolutionary times; [it is necessary to] belong to whichever seems the most just to you....If you are lucky enough to be moderate in

⁸¹H. Carnot, 1:337.

character, then use your influence to show your friends the value of reasonable action. True citizenship does not consist of living in an impossible equilibrium, but in going along with those who are on the side of good, in seeking to prevent exaggerations, in correcting abuses, and in repairing wrongs. But it is very difficult to distinguish among the men who offer their services between those who are sincere and those who are merely ambitious. In this situation, nothing resembles the true patriot more than the egotist and the schemer.⁸²

Carnot's opinion of moderates and independents is both practical and in line with his thinking in general; he saw at once that even moderates become radicals in attempting to dominate. The ability to reason empirically, as Carnot habitually did, was a more valuable quality than moderation, he argued, and party affiliation was acceptable, within limits, if the party's principles seemed just. Who, however, were those who were on the side of the good? Carnot did not identify them, and left it open to individual interpretation. The events of the Terror would show that Carnot, choosing the lesser of two evils, believed that the Committee of Public Safety was on the side of the good, and that the Committee was necessary for the nation's political and ideological welfare.

The Committee of Public Safety chose Carnot for his military expertise, which had proved successful the preceding year, and he would exercise almost exclusive control of military matters until the spring of 1794, when

⁸²H. Carnot, 1:339.

Saint-Just became involved. As representative-on-mission to the northern armies which were beginning a crucial campaign, Saint-Just used his position in the field and his authority on the Committee to take charge. In some cases he ignored or countermanded Carnot's military directives, and dealt with the generals personally. Carnot strongly disapproved of what he viewed as Saint-Just's high-handedness, and the two of them fell out over the surrender terms for the town of Charleroi, which Saint-Just drew up on his own initiative. In Carnot's opinion, the terms did not reflect the Committee's official policy, and he said "some of the articles of capitulation show a certain esteem and condescension for the enemies towards whom we must proclaim hatred and contempt, unless we wish the French soldier to turn soft and to take pity on the fate of the hypocritical and bloodthirsty enemies of our liberty."⁸³ Saint-Just had also advised the concentration of military authority, with himself as general representative-on-mission, and generals Pichegru and Jourdan under his immediate jurisdiction. This proposal ran counter to Carnot's position on the Committee and his accepted role as military expert, and he resented and vigorously opposed Saint-Just's interference.

Although the armies were his particular province, and he performed his duties with his customary determination,

⁸³Palmer, p. 354.

thoroughness and practicality, Carnot was not isolated from the larger political concerns of the Committee, and he remained cognizant of the Revolution's progress as a whole. His speeches in the Convention dealt with political matters as often as military ones, and they continued to echo and to reinforce his political sentiments. In March 1794 he had more to say on the subject of ambition and factionalism, which remained a dual threat to the republic and which certainly, he argued, should no longer exist:

If the same energy and the same unity were used against the internal enemies [which have been used against those outside], how much more the Republic would prosper!...What therefore prevents this? Some obscure factions, some men greedy for gold, blood or power? No--the people want these vile passions to disappear. As the repository of the people's authority, swear that you [the Convention] will preserve that authority in all its fulness, that you will never permit this sacred trust to be violated, that you will not allow any part of what has been entrusted to you by all the people to be usurped by any faction....⁸⁴

One of the major events which made the government --or the Committee of Public Safety as its executive-- revolutionary in fact as well as in name was the fall of the Girondins and the arrest and subsequent execution of Danton and his colleagues. Carnot had parted ideological company with the Girondins over their lenient position towards the king, and he had little liking for Danton, whom he called a "violent and theatrical man,"⁸⁵ or for Danton's entourage.

⁸⁴H. Carnot, 1:564.

⁸⁵Ibid., 1:368.

In spite of his personal animosity towards Danton, Carnot opposed the Committee's order for his arrest, and only Lindet joined him in this opposition. Lindet later refused to yield to the Committee's pressure and would not sign the decree ordering Danton's execution. Carnot eventually signed only when he realized that his arguments had no effect on the Committee members. He capitulated in order to preserve the appearance of unity within the Committee, but he registered a written protest along with his signature:

You [the Committee] accuse Danton of treason, and you do not have a single proof against him. Nothing is safe from calumny and suspicion, and I hear nothing alleged [by you] here but suspicions. Don't raise bloody quarrels among the men who have worked together to found the Republic. These proscriptions are more dangerous to it than the conspiracy you appear to punish. Think it over very carefully--a head like Danton's leads to a lot of others. Doubtless you are powerful enough to condemn to death those whomever you wish to designate. But if you pave the way to the scaffold for the representatives of the people, we will all go the same way.⁸⁶

Carnot's prophetic protest was the fatal blow to the tenuous relationship between him and Robespierre, and effectively ended any remaining ability for the two of them to work together on the Committee. Saint-Just, the staunch ally of Robespierre who is often considered the co-architect of the Terror, had been jealous of Carnot's control of military affairs, and he saw Carnot's protest providing additional opportunities to remove some of that control.

⁸⁶H. Carnot, 1:369.

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⁸⁶H. Carnot, 1:369.

Saint-Just returned to the field to take charge of the armies of the North and the Sambre-et-Meuse, and continued to question or change Carnot's directives.

Regardless of the in-fighting going on in the Committee and the dissension which Carnot tried to ignore and acknowledged only when he felt absolutely compelled to in order to preserve the semblance of revolutionary unity, the business of government went on. Carnot presented his decree to the Convention on 1 April 1794 concerning the suppression of the provisional executive council and its ministers. He had voiced his opposition to the power of the executive before, but now, speaking in the name of the Committee of Public Safety, he knew that the Convention would acquiesce.

As usual with Carnot's speeches and reports, there was a heavy dose of his political philosophy included before he dealt with specifics. The provisional executive council was an institution too closely related to those created by kings as part of a single hereditary government which had maintained the three separate estates and other social and political distinctions and prejudices. Such an institution cannot become the regulator of a representative government founded on the principles of equality, Carnot said, and in the place of the council and the ministers, he proposed twelve new commissions that would be under the Convention's authority, but also be attached directly to the Committee of Public Safety. Carnot concluded by saying that "the twelve

commissions embrace the whole system for the execution of the law...they will fulfill the objectives of a government invested with all the powers necessary to do good, while [they] are powerless to do harm. Such are the revolutionary means which the Committee of Public Safety proposes to exist until the peace...."⁸⁷ The Convention agreed as expected, abolished the council and the ministries, and the revolutionary government ruled alone.

Carnot served his obligatory term as president of the Convention in May 1794, a term during which Robespierre presented his lengthy pronouncement on the Supreme Being and the relationship between religious and moral ideals and republican principles. Carnot expressed his own opinion of the Supreme Being, which was really not so different from Robespierre's. Both concepts were founded on the same philosophical principles nurtured in the same intellectual climate of the Enlightenment, but while Robespierre made--or tried to make--the worship of the Supreme Being into a cult, Carnot saw it as simply part of natural law and the wisdom of virtue. "What is the Supreme Being," he wrote, "if it is not the great truth which contains all truths, the eternal order of nature, immutable justice, the sublime virtue which embraces all virtues, affection which reaffirms all pure

⁸⁷Débats de la Convention nationale. Analyse complète des séances. 5 vols. (Paris: Baudouin Frères, 1828), 5:266-274.

affections?"⁸⁸ Belief in the Supreme Being was both possible and logical to Carnot, who had rigorously and continuously opposed the established church and its clergy. He opposed organized religion because it appeared intolerant to him, and he believed in tolerance for the religious beliefs of everyone. The major point of departure between Carnot's and Robespierre's view of the Supreme Being was that to Carnot it was a concept, while to Robespierre it was a cult. Carnot thought that the establishment of such a cult was simply the creation of another form of organized religion, which would persecute anyone who refused to believe in its tenets.

The cult of the Supreme Being was virtually Robespierre's last official effort, for the 9th Thermidor ended his career, his life and the Terror. On 10 Thermidor, Carnot sent a dispatch to all representatives-on-mission informing them of the events just occurred, and his language is worth noting:

...the infamous tyrants [are gone] who usurped the name of patriots, and who wished to disrupt the victories which have been the order of the day along all our frontiers. The traitors have paid the price for their serious crimes, and the national representatives have delivered France from her modern-day Catilina: Robespierre and his accomplices are no more! Oppression has disappeared...⁸⁹

⁸⁸Tissot, p. 199.

⁸⁹Ibid. p. 377.

Although his warning at the time of Danton's arrest proved to be true, Carnot would lead a precarious political existence after Thermidor; the reaction to the Terror demanded explanations, assigned responsibility, and exacted its own brand of revolutionary justice.

In retrospect, there is perhaps some validity to Reinhard's assessment of Carnot's ideology as an example of "enlightened naïveté," particularly during 1793-1794, which is both Palmer's "Year of the Terror" and the Year Two of the Republic. Reinhard characterizes Carnot as "helpless" when he discovered the "insidious enemies of the Republic" who by the beginning of 1794 seemed to express a desire for violence for its own sake, thus demonstrating the triumph of brutality and raw passion over reason and principle, proving that the "general will was nothing but a myth."⁹⁰

Other opinions of Carnot during this single year are divided. Palmer believes that the Terror made radicals of even the most moderate men, Carnot included,⁹¹ provided they escaped the guillotine before they recognized certain political truths. Dupre says that Carnot's political position was "quite equivocal on certain critical occasions,"⁹² and that his actions pointed to

⁹⁰Reinhard, 2:147.

⁹¹Palmer, p. 8.

⁹²Dupre, p. 283.

indecisiveness. Phipps keeps Carnot safely in the "War Office" for the duration of the Terror, except for a few unfortunate blunderings-about in Flanders⁹³, while Lefebvre continues to label Carnot a bourgeois conservative and saves his final dismissal for the 9th of Thermidor.

Hippolyte Carnot offers many explanations for his father's actions, but one might wonder if he thinks these explanations are necessary to minimize his father's role on the Committee of Public Safety. In this context, Hippolyte Carnot nearly confirms the "modern conservative" picture of his father as the "painstaking patriot surrounded by ferocious Terrorists, who was forced to cooperate with radicals against his will,"⁹⁴ to use Palmer's description. Carnot was quite capable of explaining himself, and what lends weight to many of his statements is that they were made before conditions made explanations necessary.

It is true that Carnot was a member of the Committee of Public Safety from its effective beginning in September 1793, and it is also true that he was selected mainly because of his military expertise. Carnot understood as well some basic revolutionary facts of life, one of which was the "necessity for a temporary dictatorship in the presence of danger." Another was that the people, in order

⁹³Phipps, 1:260.

⁹⁴Palmer, p. 81.

to defend themselves and the Revolution, would "voluntarily submit themselves" to such authority. In 1793 that authority was the Committee of Public Safety, and whatever ideological differences and disagreements over method were violently discussed over what Palmer calls the "green table", the Committee's goal was to preserve the Republic. In this context, Carnot was a willing participant, whatever his political label; and he regarded dereliction of public duty, however unpleasant and difficult that duty might be at times, as much a crime as that committed by a soldier who deserts the battlefield. "I habitually vote with the Montagnards," Carnot wrote, "not because I always share their opinions, but in order not to vote with a faction which seems to me to be far more dangerous."⁹⁵ Hippolyte Carnot explains that alliance with the Committee, and therefore with the Terror, was preferable to abandoning the cause of the Revolution entirely. True to his principles, Carnot remained on the Committee for its duration, to try to "ameliorate the evils he was powerless to prevent."

Reinhard has characterized Carnot as being more empirical than doctrinaire, and more practical during the crucial year of the Committee's existence because the extraordinary circumstances virtually insisted on political practicality--even political accommodation--on Carnot's part

⁹⁵H. Carnot, 1: 410.

instead of blindly intransigent adherence to ideology. Carnot's practicality and his fortunately larger view of the political realities during this year mitigated somewhat whatever feelings of dismay, disappointment, disillusionment or even helplessness which he may have felt during his tenure on the Committee. No sacrifice was too great, public or private, if it guaranteed the survival of the Republic. When it became obvious that violence was indispensable in the same way that exceptional measures were necessary to guarantee public welfare, Carnot joined with the Terrorists in theory and in fact. That was true, Hippolyte Carnot says, and as long as "the Nation was in danger" from internal division or external menace, Carnot believed that some compromises were both necessary and politically expedient to preserve unity. Once the danger was past, then Carnot re-asserted both his independence and his principles by opposing either circumstances or régimes which ran counter to them.

If Carnot's public career, especially during 1792-1797, is an example of "versatile ambition," then it is a curious example. It would seem instead that he succeeded in holding visibly important posts--and surviving them despite setbacks--while attempting to maintain most of his principles, which frequently placed him at odds with those who could and did determine the fate of adversaries and compatriots alike. Ambition requires continuous compromise,

a sort of weathervane approach, in which Talleyrand, for example, had virtually no equal; and at best Carnot compromised in a crisis, and then only so far and for so long.

A Question of Signatures, A Degree of Responsibility

The Committee of Public Safety survived the events of 9-10 Thermidor, naturally much weakened, naturally with some new members--of the original twelve, only Carnot, Lindet, and Prieur de la Côte d'Or made the initial transition from radical terror to conservative reaction. Their powers, like those of the Committee itself, were significantly curtailed, and their activities scrutinized; their personal prestige was now more a liability than an asset. It became not only popular but a virtual necessity to make anti-Robespierrist statements in the months following Thermidor. Carnot obliged, and in his practical fashion explained at length what had occurred during the last three or four months of the Committee's existence as the revolutionary government: the fear of denunciation on a political whim of Robespierre's, the increasing disunity and discord among the members, the arbitrary usurpation of authority in previously specialized areas, the inability of some members to prevent the excesses of others. Although it was well-known within the Committee that Carnot had an active dislike for Robespierre, it was not generally known outside the

Committee. The Thermidorians were not aware--or perhaps they chose to ignore--the charges Robespierre and Saint-Just made against Carnot for having introduced "moderation" into the republican armies, and for not supporting to his fullest extent the political events of 31 May 1793.⁹⁶

Carnot made his openly anti-Robespierrist statements in the Convention on 3 October 1794, when charges were brought against Billaud-Varenne, Collot d'Herbois and Barère. In defending his former colleagues, Carnot realized he was defending his own actions, and found himself in an unenviable position: once attacked by Robespierre for being a moderate, he was now very likely to be condemned by the Thermidorians--notably Larivière--as a terrorist.⁹⁷ During the 3 October meeting of the Convention when the accusations were first brought against their colleagues, both Carnot and Prieur de la Côte d'Or attempted to defend them, but their remarks, while duly recorded, did little to change the outcome. In fact, the proceedings at this time provided reasons enough for Carnot's eventual indictment and proscription. It was sufficient for Larivière to say later to Carnot that "to fail to prevent crime is to commit it."⁹⁸

⁹⁶H. Carnot, 1:416.

⁹⁷Reinhard, 2:154.

⁹⁸Albert Mathiez, After Robespierre. The Thermidorian Reaction. (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1965), p. 214.

Barère said, in his own defense, "I call on the well-known integrity of my colleagues Prieur, Carnot and Lindet. They were present at all our meetings; nothing was done which was not deliberated and attested to in common," and Collot d'Herbois added "you will see whether or not Lindet, Prieur and Carnot assisted us with their views, and supported us by their signatures."⁹⁹ Carnot denied nothing. Instead, he agreed in the strongest possible terms, even though he certainly realized it was risky to do so: "I say that everything which my colleagues have just told you is the exact truth. I did assist in all the Committee's deliberations, and it is wrong, as some have said, that I was relegated to my office."¹⁰⁰

Thus it came down to a question of signatures and the corresponding degree of responsibility those signatures represented. The question was debated in general, while specific allegations were made during the trial of Billaud-Varenne, Collot d'Herbois and Barère which began on 23 March 1795. The explanation for the signatures of the Committee of Public Safety's orders and decrees which Carnot gave "has been accepted by the great majority of historians; it is classic," Aulard writes.¹⁰¹ Carnot's defense dealt with the

⁹⁹Débats, 5:458.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 5:465.

¹⁰¹Aulard, 2:250.

major issues raised by the Convention of assigning responsibility for the political decrees, arrest orders and other "terrorist" acts of the Committee, and then whether Carnot himself should be considered equally responsible with Robespierre, Saint-Just, Couthon and the rest for what the Thermidorians thought were the excesses of the Terror. Carnot explained that the way in which the Committee functioned was imposed on it by the exigencies of revolutionary circumstances and the multiplicity of duties it discharged. It would therefore be unfair to place moral responsibility on any individual member on the Committee for acts originating from an area of specialization not his own, even if his signature might appear on any or all of these documents.¹⁰² Aulard agrees with Carnot to a point, or at least he acknowledges that each of the twelve members indeed specialized, to the extent that his colleagues took on trust and without discussion most of the measures he undertook in his own area, as long as these measures did not concern politics in general.¹⁰³

Carnot also explained that the signatures at the bottom of documents implied neither participation in a decision nor approval of an action to be taken, nor even an understanding of the actual order or decree itself. Instead, the

¹⁰²H. Carnot, 1:572.

¹⁰³Aulard, 2:248.

signatures, especially those which were affixed *en second*, were simply a sort of rubber stamp. Only the first signer, who was usually the author of the decree, took the responsibility for the decree. In this way, Carnot could, and admitted that he did, avoid the worst abuses committed by Robespierre and Saint-Just, and the purely police actions of Couthon.¹⁰⁴ His statement seems contradictory, since he had admitted to direct participation in the Committee's deliberations, but there is a difference between the deliberations, where disagreements were expressed concerning measures, and the decrees which resulted.

Aulard takes exception to this portion of Carnot's defense. He says that a direct examination of the Committee's papers proves that Carnot was wrong, and the real responsibility lay in having written or signed the minutes of the deliberations, regardless of whether the signature was principal or secondary.¹⁰⁵ Aulard is right in his assessment, but Carnot did not mention the issue of the minutes; he spoke only of the decrees and the orders themselves.

When Carnot described himself as a "worker," he meant that he spent a significant majority of his time concentrating on the duties and responsibilities of his area

¹⁰⁴Reinhard, 2:59.

¹⁰⁵Aulard, 2:249.

of specialization. He did not imply that as a worker he had little involvement with the Committee as a whole, nor did he imply that the "politicians" had scant regard for their own areas. Some historians, Aulard in particular, interpret Carnot's distinctions as an attempt to escape responsibility for the Terror.¹⁰⁶

Carnot reminded the accusers of his colleagues of some political facts they might have forgotten. "A single fact will suffice, it seems to me, for the accused and for all the charges [against them], which is that France had her back to the wall when the Committee took over, and she was saved when the Committee was finished."¹⁰⁷ His statement embraced the entire Committee, for its unity of purpose was one aspect which Carnot tried to preserve, even when he opposed some of those purposes; his signature on Danton's arrest and execution decrees is a case in point. Carnot's statement includes Robespierre and Saint-Just as well, for in public he defended their actions as he defended the other members' actions. Only in private did he disagree with Robespierre and Saint-Just, and call them extremists who exceeded and distorted the Committee's purpose. Carnot's obvious relief at Robespierre's fall was expressed in public only after the fact.

¹⁰⁶Aulard, 2:249.

¹⁰⁷H. Carnot, 1:573.

Carnot asked if the welfare of the state did not require stringent justice to be applied, especially during a revolutionary period, and added that the political decrees of the Committee had received the approval of the Convention. "You distrusted your strength too much, which is that of the whole nation. Many believed that one faction was necessary to counter another, [and] today we can no longer withstand the torrent which we have allowed to grow...it is time to oppose our common enemies and to stop tearing ourselves apart....The crime of tyranny was expiated on 10 Thermidor. Whoever loves his country will no longer look for new persons to blame; he shall not lose the republic on the pretext of avenging it."¹⁰⁸

Carnot's reasonableness, his practical and logical explanations of the Committee's workings in general and his own activities in particular, and his eloquence in the best tradition of revolutionary rhetoric made little impression on those who listened--and evidently on some later historians as well. The Thermidorians appeared determined to place the entire blame for the Terror on the remaining members of the Committee of Public Safety, and on their representatives-on-mission, on their generals, and any other functionaries they could discover. The list of proscriptions would grow very large indeed. Although his

¹⁰⁸H. Carnot, 1:577.

three colleagues would be judged guilty on all counts, and although Carnot would not be found equally guilty until later, he realized that he had very real reasons to fear for his personal safety, and that at the least, both his political career and his personal prestige, primarily as the "organizer of victory," had suffered significantly. He might still hold office, and exercise some authority, within reduced limits, over military affairs, but he was no longer in any position to help anyone with whom he had been associated, nor able to guarantee the practical application of the political ideals he believed were still necessary for the nation's welfare. For Carnot, the latter was the most serious loss.

He concluded his defense by serving as his own character witness, and the qualities he outlined were certainly not unknown to those who had worked with him in any of his official capacities or who had listened to him speak repeatedly of his political philosophy:

My character, which you know, my private habits, and all the speeches I have made before this tribune on many occasions, make [these charges] appear too absurd and too improbable. I undertook numerous delicate missions, and I was harsh to no one but myself. My actions were those of an honest man, my correspondence was that of a sensible and moral one. I served democracy to the best of my ability, I was passionately attached to the popular cause, and above all I maintained a dignity of character wherever my duties called me...I never missed an opportunity to speak out against any faction whatsoever, against tyranny in any form, and against the permanence of power....¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹Débats, 5:478.

Carnot's defense was unusually eloquent for him, though its predominant tone was still one of logic. On the one hand, his defense is believable, and its explanations of both the bureaucratic workings of the Committee and Carnot's specific role on the Committee seem straightforward and unemotional. On the other hand, his defense strikes a note of evasiveness, and appears to be a clever attempt to distance himself from the excesses of the Terror. Historians inimical towards the Committee of Public Safety and the Terror as a sinister and violent aberration in the Revolution's progress condemn Carnot for his evasiveness and his role on the Committee. So do historians favorable to the Committee and its actions, because they believe that Carnot was in fact as much a part of the Committee as Robespierre, Saint-Just and Couthon, and therefore equally responsible for the Terror.

Primary evidence shows several things which are difficult to dispute. First, Carnot was a member of the Committee of Public Safety from its beginning until well past 9 Thermidor, and although he dealt primarily with specialized military functions, by his own public admission he knew what the Committee as a whole was doing throughout his tenure on it. Second, while he disliked and probably feared Robespierre and opposed his extremism, and while he actively resented Saint-Just's interference in military

matters and disliked him for being Robespierre's ally, Carnot kept his political opposition and personal dislikes within the Committee's confines. In public he supported the Committee's actions, including those initiated by Robespierre and Saint-Just, because his belief in the value of political unity overrode his personal aversions. Third, Carnot's name appears on a large number of decrees and orders--more times, in fact, than Robespierre's--and many of these were for arrests and executions. Whether or not Carnot read the decrees or knew what every one of them contained--as he claimed he did not--he still signed them, and his signature, either first or *en second*, implied a tacit approval of the Committee's actions in particular and the necessity of the Terror in general. Carnot is not considered a co-architect of the Terror in the same way Robespierre and Saint-Just are considered to be, but Carnot was one of the twelve Committee members and he could not deny that. Membership entailed responsibility, and although the degree of responsibility in the context of initiating violence, of condoning or actively supporting extreme measures, and of drawing up or merely signing orders of execution may be debated, in the end the evidence shows that all twelve members were responsible for the events of 1793-1794, Carnot no less than Robespierre.

V. THE DIRECTORY AND THE COUP OF 18 FRUCTIDOR

In the chaotic months immediately preceding the establishment of the Directory, Carnot existed in a sort of political no-man's-land. His defense of himself and his colleagues earned him the continued suspicion of the Thermidorians, and his opinions of them did little to allay that suspicion. Tallien and Barras in particular appeared to Carnot to be the sworn enemies of the Revolution, committed to their personal gain at the republic's expense. "You didn't reproach our terrorists when they carried the Terror straight into the enemy's camps," Carnot told Tallien in the spring of 1795. "We were useful enough to you then."¹¹⁰ The Thermidorians reopened the Jacobin clubs merely in order to gain their support, as Carnot saw it, and he opposed the reopening on the grounds of factionalism, thereby running counter to the majority's intentions.

Carnot's gradual loss of power was not so much the fall from grace of a politician--which he was not--as much as it was the result of the fall of a political system, the wholesale dismissal or proscription of large numbers of officials, and the advent of yet another form of government which might or might not last.¹¹¹ He remained on the

¹¹⁰Reinhard, 2:157.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*, 2:237.

periphery of power, largely because his military abilities still served some useful purpose, but his political ideas, which he continued to express, fell on deaf or hostile ears.

A new constitution, together with two legislative councils and a five-member executive directory, was drawn up and debated in the Convention during the summer of 1795. Carnot did not have anything to say publicly on either the constitution or the restructuring of the government, but his son preserved personal notes which his father made on the subject. It is doubtful whether Carnot's views, if they had been expressed in the Convention, would have altered the outcome in any way. Carnot did not see much value in a dual legislative system, especially since it would not be popularly elected; a single assembly chosen by universal suffrage and frequently renewed would be a much better means of exercising legislative power, he thought. Another separate assembly, also popularly elected, would be composed of the elite men of talent and political experience who Carnot had believed since the beginning of his career were the ones most suited to govern. This would be a more permanent body, charged with the interpreting and maintaining of the laws enacted by the legislative assembly.¹¹² The concept of a five-member executive directory which was likely to disagree seemed hardly

¹¹²H. Carnot, 2:3.

conducive to the establishment of either confidence or stability. Carnot's assessment, even though he spoke after the fact, was an accurate description of the Directory: "...deprived of any influence in the councils, even of the ability to make itself respected by them, [the directors] could neither dissolve, prolong nor adjourn the councils and their execution of decrees, (and) it seemed that there were only coups d'état to supplement its impotence. One went from one extreme to the other. We resembled drunkards who, after falling down to the right, know how to get up only to fall down to the left."¹¹³

The elections held on 30 October 1795 for the Council of Ancients sent Carnot to that body. The Thermidorians and the moderates of Pas-de-Calais were skeptical of Carnot as a former member of the Committee of Public Safety, and apparently forgetting his other, less controversial services to his constituency and to the nation, did not elect him. He appeared on the supplemental lists of twelve departments and was elected directly by only one, the Sarthe, with which he had no previous connections.¹¹⁴ Carnot accepted, with the modest disclaimer "I accept, apologizing for the feebleness of my means, but with the confidence that my zeal and aptitude for work gives me."¹¹⁵ His acceptance was not for

¹¹³H. Carnot, 2:4.

¹¹⁴Reinhard, 2:165.

¹¹⁵H. Carnot, 2:11.

the disinterested reason his son gives--the idea that a deputy should not represent a locality but all of France--but rather because he wanted to get back into politics and have the opportunity to speak out officially on the next stage of the Revolution.

Sieyès declined his election as one of the five directors, and the four who did accept--Barras, Reubell, LaRevellière, and Letourneur--asked Carnot to serve as Minister of War. He refused the appointment, saying "I can hardly understand how these men, among whom I know I have at least two major enemies--Reubell and Barras--could offer me a position of importance."¹¹⁶ Carnot did allow his name to be submitted to the Council of Five Hundred for the vacant director's position, to which he was elected on 3 November. He became one of the five men upon whom the destiny of the nation would depend, and in his own words, "the more the whims of the [five] are in disagreement, the more the state will suffer from their fluctuations."¹¹⁷ Carnot had seen discord first-hand in the Committee of Public Safety, which had been a much tighter organization than the Directory was ever likely to be, and he had every reason to doubt that unity of purpose and political ideals would prevail among the five.

¹¹⁶H. Carnot, 2:9.

¹¹⁷Reinhard, 2:167.

Carnot could only count on the support of Letourneur, a fellow engineering officer, while the Girondin LaRevellière and the Thermidorian Barras would not forgive him the power he had exercised on the Committee. Carnot's personal opinions of his directorial colleagues was hardly flattering: Barras was "the protector of disreputable nobles and those committed to violence;" Reubell was "one of those accused of theft;" and LaRevellière was a "scandalous priest, hypocritical and immoral."¹¹⁸

Why would Carnot serve a régime which apparently contradicted most of his political principles, and why would he subject himself to the sort of personal vendettas of which he knew his enemies were capable? He said that "the beginning of the Directory was difficult in the extreme," and he hoped that the zeal and the good intentions of the authorities--or most of them--would be reinforced and thereby re-establish a time of confidence.¹¹⁹ Because of the obvious shortcomings of the Directory, Carnot believed that there was room for improvements and that the only way to be certain of those improvements was to be part of the government. He had survived Robespierre's personal attacks and the near-condemnation by the Thermidorians, and he was

¹¹⁸Reinhard, 2:170.

¹¹⁹H. Carnot, 2:17.

quite prepared--and certainly thick-skinned enough--to deal with the probable recriminations of Barras and his allies.

The times required stability: "You cannot always be at fever pitch; the people want the revolution they have made, but they do not want one which is perpetual," Carnot said.¹²⁰ It was also time, he believed, to consolidate the gains and correct the aberrations of the past two years. The Revolution was more or less at an end--or should be--in the sense that its principles of liberty and equality prevailed to a greater or lesser degree in the civil laws and in the political institutions, and by the fact that several European powers recognized the Republic's existence. Now the legislators and the directors should both work to guarantee that those principles remained and to perfect the existing republican organization. The government "revolutionary until the peace" had served its purpose, and now should be replaced by a normal one supported by the constitution. His strong reservations about executive power remained, but the "exceptional circumstances" which he thought still existed justified Carnot's belief, his son argues, that an intensity of executive action was required.¹²¹

¹²⁰H. Carnot, 2:14.

¹²¹Ibid., 1:586.

The exceptional circumstances included, among other things, the Babeuf conspiracy and a resurgence of royalist agitation--two extremes which Carnot disliked and distrusted equally. He opposed both because they were very real threats to the republic; they were "blind fanatics who slandered liberty and attempted to raise the throne in the name of the heaven which had denounced them; the ambitious ones who covered themselves in the cloak of popularity to mislead a credulous crowd, whose hopes would be deceived...the liberty which the French people want is nothing now but the bloody specter that some use to frighten others, while some pray to it with the adoration of fanatics...."¹²²

The threat to the right and sanctity of property which Babeuf and his followers represented was as undesirable as the threat of a return to privilege which a resurgence of the nobles represented. Carnot had not been an ardent champion of property rights--he had opposed the new constitution's reintroduction of them as a voting qualification. He considered that all male citizens twenty-one and older who paid taxes--he never defined the amount--were bona fide citizens and therefore eligible to vote. Ownership of a specific amount of real property or the payment of its equivalent in taxes was another form of

¹²²H. Carnot, 2:100.

unjust distinction which limited participation in the government of the republic. Carnot believed, however, that the Babouvists were a danger to the republic's stability. Their ideas bordered on anarchy, in his opinion. He had spoken against the nobles and a return of the emigrés on so many occasions that now he believed his arguments lost their impact and persuasiveness through such constant repetition. In any case, the other directors agreed with him about Babeuf, but they were divided on the question of the returning emigrés. Set in the middle of two conspiracies and surrounded by examples of increasing personal and political ambitiousness, Carnot saw the probability of an approaching conflict which would imperil the constitution, and in its ruins he saw two equally disastrous threats to the people's liberty and morality--complete anarchy or the intervention of a soldier in the political realm.¹²³

There are no personal sacrifices which I would not be more than ready to make for my country's benefit; but I would sooner perish than permit the constitution to be harmed or the powers which it instituted to be dishonored. I will use, against these new factions which would indiscriminately undermine or rise up against the established government, the same energy which I used against both the reactionaries and the anarchists.¹²⁴

Carnot's position in the government of the Directory had deteriorated even more by the spring of 1797, and he

¹²³H. Carnot, 2:130.

¹²⁴Ibid., 2:11.

thought the republic and the Revolution's achievements had deteriorated as well. He wrote to Mathieu Dumas in July that "the anarchists and the royalists fight to see which of them will bathe in the blood of those republicans who fall on the swords of fanaticism, of the emigrés, of Babouvism. [Our] enemies work indefatigably, our friends sleep, the republic collapses, chaos arrives."¹²⁵

Within the Directory, Carnot was permanently estranged; his antipathy towards Barras nearly resulted in a duel--uncharacteristic of Carnot but evidence of the extremes to which he was pushed. His role in military concerns had been effectively usurped by Bonaparte, notably as the result of the latter's initiative in peace negotiations during the first Italian campaign of 1796-1797. The treaty of Leoben marked the beginning of a general peace, but it also marked the end of Carnot's era as organizer of victory; that role belonged to Bonaparte, and Italy superseded the Rhine.¹²⁶

Carnot's antagonism towards Bonaparte originated not from any personality clashes but from the old fear of the Caesar-complex, which appeared even in 1797 likely to place the victorious general firmly in the ranks of policy-makers. "He will completely devote himself to the political role, as a legislator and even as a reformer," Carnot wrote to a

¹²⁵Reinhard, 2:231.

¹²⁶Ibid., 2:222.

friend. "If he has a plan, it can only be in opposition to that of the Jacobins; he will be a path to order, if he is not order himself."¹²⁷ It would be order--or stability--with a price attached, for Carnot believed that it would mean the effective end of the Revolution.

It is ironic that Barras and Reubell would accuse Carnot of royalist sympathies in their efforts to discredit him and remove him from the Directory. This is especially true in light of Carnot's history of anti-royalist pronouncements, his role as a regicide, and his public opposition to the return of the emigrés. It is true that a few of his personal friends such as Mathieu Dumas, Lacuée, and Beffroy de Reigny had royalist sympathies to a greater or lesser degree, but they were under no illusions as to Carnot's opinion on the subject. The irony is compounded in the context of Carnot's speech as president of the Directory which commemorated the events of 10 August 1792; his words leave little doubt that he believed a return to monarchism in any form whatsoever would destroy both liberty and the republic.¹²⁸ Carnot also spoke to the directors in no uncertain terms a few days before Fructidor, and his language was not designed to help his cause with his opponents.

¹²⁷Reinhard, 2:242.

¹²⁸Dupre, p. 241.

Do you tell us what is necessary to do when part of the legislative corps wants to institute a counter-revolution, and that this part is influenced to such an extent that it is on the verge of repealing all resolutions and paralyzing all beneficial measures? I say first that you can prevent this crisis by more consideration and deference towards the legislative corps, by making your pronouncements to them less harsh and imperious, by revoking certain executive commissioners...the legislative corps fears, by giving the Directory too much latitude and, above all, financial control, that it will prolong the war rather than end it....I also say that the worst period having nearly ended, it would be better to have a 20 June [1789] than a 31 May [1792]. The patriotic representatives should address the French people and prove to them that [our enemies] do not cease to undermine the constitution.

Carnot's error was not his aversion to royalists; his error was his inflexibility. Cambacères wrote later that such "inflexible integrity" and "lofty disinterestedness" was an affront to the other directors, and seemed in particular to be an unspoken but nevertheless "severe censure" of Barras' and Reubell's shady double-dealings.¹³⁰ They were less antagonistic toward the royalists than Carnot, but they, together with LaReveillière, had the power of the majority to accuse Carnot of whatever they wished, regardless of how far removed from the truth it was, and to make the accusation stick. Because of their power, they were able to engineer the coup d'état of 18 Fructidor (3-4 September 1797) and remove Carnot and Barthélemy from office.

¹²⁹H. Carnot, 2:161.

¹³⁰Dupre, p. 244.

Carnot had been warned of the coup during the night of 4 September, and he escaped from his house and shortly afterwards he fled from Paris to Geneva. He was proscribed along with some sixty-five members of the government and condemned to deportation to Cayenne. Carnot's exile was to last for over two years, and took him from Switzerland to Germany, always under some sort of official surveillance. "The immortal day of Fructidor is typical of all those days of disaster and horror that took place," Carnot wrote during the first days of his exile. "It is through them that the brigands of all time justify their actions which rip apart their country. Fructidor shall certainly be immortal in the annals of crime."¹³¹

During his stay in Augsburg, Carnot obtained a copy of the report prepared by J. C. Bailleul, which purported to be the official explanation of the coup and the reasons behind it. Because Bailleul's report devoted some twelve lines of text and forty-five lines of notes specifically to Carnot,¹³² the latter felt obligated to respond to the allegations and misrepresentations contained in the report. Carnot's written response followed the pattern of his earlier oral defense of the Committee of Public Safety in 1794-1795 and his replies to the accusations made against him in 1797: it

¹³¹H. Carnot, 2:176.

¹³²Dupre, n. p. 315.

was political, precise and practical, with the expected reiteration of the principles he refused to abandon. He categorically denied the existence of any proof linking him to Pichegru's conspiracy, and said that the three directors had more to answer for on that point than he did. He dismissed Barras, Reubell and LaRevellière by saying that they were not republicans but assassins of the republic and destroyers of the constitution's legitimacy, and he accused Barras of heading the faction which wanted to restore the monarchy in the person of the duc d'Orléans.¹³³ Instead, the Directory had established a dictatorship for itself through the coup of 18 Fructidor, which seemed analogous to a monarchy, in Carnot's opinion, and as such meant the end of the republic. "I have certainly made many mistakes in a [political] career for which I was not at all destined," Carnot concluded, "but I have never abandoned the principles which have served me in all the torments of the Revolution...my only crime is in having tried to protect the French people from tyrants."¹³⁴ The response to Bailleul was suppressed in France, but it was translated and published in both England and the United States.

¹³³Dupre, p. 249.

¹³⁴Ibid., p. 251.

VI. THE CONSULATE AND THE EMPIRE

Bonaparte's Minister

The law of 3 Nivose Year VIII (24 December 1799), enacted after the coup of 18 Brumaire, permitted Carnot to return to France, which he did in January 1800. The Consulate restored his military rank and length of service, which the law of 19 Fructidor had removed. The political situation, though quite different from the days of the Directory's dictatorship, was still characterized by undercurrents and resentments which were holdovers from previous stages of revolutionary turmoil. Carnot found that his return placed him in the center of many of these on-going factional disputes, and he was still the target of much of it. Those who engineered the coup of Fructidor hated those whom they had proscribed, especially the author of the Réponse de Bailleul; the democratically-inclined hated those responsible for the execution of Babeuf; the royalists and moderates were overtly hostile to the regicide member of the Committee of Public Safety; and Sieyès, one of the three consuls, made no secret of his dislike of Carnot.¹³⁵

In spite of the opposition originating from so many quarters, Bonaparte appeared determined to have Carnot as his minister of war. Remembering his opinion of Bonaparte's

¹³⁵Reinhard, 2:246.

high-handedness in the negotiations with the Austrians in 1797, Carnot hesitated to accept the position because he felt certain that the First Consul would not permit him to carry out his duties with any degree of real independence. Bonaparte was, after all, the soldier who had entered the political arena, as Carnot had predicted during the chaotic days of the Directory, and Bonaparte's concerns would extend far beyond military matters. Only when the First Consul promised him a free hand did Carnot become Minister of War on 2 April. As organizer and administrator Carnot still had few equals, but any military innovations similar to those he designed and implemented in 1792-1793 were now the province of the First Consul. Carnot administered the second Italian campaign, but Bonaparte conceived and executed it, and therein lay the difference. After the decisive victory of Marengo concluded the campaign, secured an armistice, re-established the Cisalpine and Ligurian republics, and boosted the First Consul's prestige enormously, Carnot felt correspondingly frustrated and useless. He viewed his position as purely bureaucratic--which it was, but that was true of all the ministries--and he did not have the independence of action which he thought Bonaparte had promised. After the First Consul returned to Paris in July, Carnot offered to resign as Minister of War. He used reasons of health as his official excuse, but in a personal note to Bonaparte he explained that his admittedly inflexible ideas

on the administration of military affairs was the obvious reason. Since Marengo, Bonaparte had little tolerance for "inflexible men," yet he persuaded Carnot to stay on.¹³⁶

Although virtually all of Carnot's correspondence as Minister of War dealt with the myriad details required by a military campaign, he wrote a long letter to General Masséna in September 1800 which echoed some of the themes of 1792, 1795 and 1797.

In addition to the excessive numbers of war commissioners which appear to be multiplying [in the Army of Italy], intrigue, favoritism, and different illusory pretexts...have also resulted in a considerable number of individual parasites who, under the name of inspectors, controllers, agents, etc.,...appropriate the resources of the Republic for themselves and live in insolent luxury right beside the misery of our soldiers...You must see, citizen general, that the interests of the Republic and those of our allies, even your own renown and the honor of the French name insist that these disorders stop.¹³⁷

Since Masséna was already well on his way to earning his reputation as the most dedicated and prolific plunderer in Bonaparte's army, it is doubtful that he took Carnot's advice to heart, or acted upon it.

Carnot's position as Minister of War was also undermined by the personal loyalty which many of the commanding generals felt for Bonaparte, to the extent that they resented Carnot's legitimate directives and nearly refused to comply, or at least they consulted with the First

¹³⁶Reinhard, 2:266.

¹³⁷Tissot, p. 273.

Consul before they complied. A case in point is the comments made by Augereau and Lannes, two of Bonaparte's most outspoken and overtly Jacobin generals. Augereau wrote that he was highly irritated by Carnot and his directives, that Carnot was a friend to neither Bonaparte nor him, and only the regard that he felt for Bonaparte kept a rein on his prudence and his patience, and thereby preventing a real altercation. Lannes said that his dislike of Carnot was such that unless Bonaparte could stop the "vexations which this minister gives me, I will resign, which is probably what he wants anyway."¹³⁸ Against that sort of loyalty, Carnot's administrative talents could make little headway.

Nothing changed during the next two months to improve Carnot's opinion or to raise his expectations, and he insisted that Bonaparte accept his resignation on 8 October, which the First Consul did, with little show of reluctance. On 19 October Carnot wrote to Mathieu Dumas that "although I may be ill-judged for resigning, I'm not concerned about dissuading anyone who is convinced that I have fallen into disgrace." Dumas replied that "knowing your character, your principles of administration and your independent nature, I am not at all surprised by your determination."¹³⁹

¹³⁸Reinhard, 2:264.

¹³⁹Ibid., 2:268.

Carnot retired to Saint-Omer after his resignation, but his isolation from politics would not last long. Pas-de-Calais, evidently forgetting the reservations of the recent past, elected Carnot to the Senate, which in turn elected him to the Tribune on 21 March 1802. Carnot accepted because he needed the salary, and he was also ready to give politics another try. During his tenure on the Tribune, he sided with the "ideologues" who would oppose measures designed to grant Bonaparte personal power and to re-establish any political system which resembled a monarchy.¹⁴⁰

No, and No Again

It appeared inevitable that the republic which Carnot wanted to preserve, even in its present state after the abuses of the Directory and the military coup of 18 Brumaire, was sliding more and more to the right. By 1802, when Carnot rejoined politics, the subtle and not so subtle trappings of monarchism were obvious, and gave Carnot much to oppose. The First Consul's decision to create a consul-for-life position for himself in May 1802 concerned Carnot greatly; he saw it as the shortest of steps to a hereditary monarchy, and he was the only member of the Tribune to vote against the measure. "If I were to sign my own

¹⁴⁰Reinhard, 2:271.

proscription, nothing could force me to disguise my beliefs. No.", he wrote in the voting register.¹⁴¹

Tissot says that Carnot left the ministry in 1800 because he perceived traces of a political system which was inimical to liberty, and he spoke alone against the consulate-for-life for the same reasons.¹⁴² Tissot is correct, to a point, in his evaluation of why Carnot left the ministry, but as in most of Carnot's actions, there was usually more than one motivating factor. Carnot was perhaps disillusioned that Bonaparte had not lived up to his promises, real or implicit, to continue the gains of the Revolution, but then Carnot should have understood the difference between campaign promises and actions taken after the campaign has been won. "Carnot was always easy to fool," Napoleon wrote from Saint Helena.¹⁴³ The loss of independence in his ministry was another, more personal reason that Carnot resigned, though Tissot does not say this. When it came to the creation of the Empire, Carnot opposed it with virtually every political and philosophical principle which he had held since 1784. His lengthy speech before the Tribunal in May 1804 covered his point of view in every detail; if he were the only one again to vote no,

¹⁴¹H. Carnot, 2:236.

¹⁴²Tissot, p. xxv.

¹⁴³H. Carnot, 2:129.

then those who acquiesced would understand the probable consequences.

[The orators who supported the motion and whose speeches preceded Carnot's] have given an example of moderation which I shall try to follow, in proposing some other observations which appear to me to have escaped them....I am far from wanting to diminish the honors given to the First Consul...if [he] has restored public liberty, if he has brought about the nation's welfare, is it then proper to reward him by sacrificing that same liberty? From the time that the consulate-for-life was proposed to the French people, each could see that it was just an afterthought, a preview of an ulterior goal. As a result, we have seen a rapid succession of obvious monarchical institutions....I voted against the consulate for life; I will do the same against the re-establishment of the monarchy, as I think my position as tribune obliges me to do, but it will be [done] without any passion except that for the public good, and always remaining true to myself in defending the popular cause. I have always obeyed the existing laws, even when they were the most displeasing, and I have more than once been the victim of my devotion, and I will not change my practice now....After the Peace of Amiens, Bonaparte could have chosen between a republic and a monarchy; he could have done anything he wanted, without the slightest opposition. The repository of liberty was entrusted to him and he swore to defend it....Instead it is proposed today to make the nation a hereditary and absolute property. I maintain that it is easier to establish a republic without anarchy than a monarchy without despotism. The remedy is worse than the illness, for absolute power strips away liberty, and the institution of privileges strips away both liberty and equality....The recall of the Bourbons would renew the frightful scenes of the Revolution, but excluding that dynasty does not lead to the necessity of creating a new one....I speak out against power arbitrary in itself, but not against those in whose hands that power resides....¹⁴⁴

Napoleon did not take exception to Carnot's speech; he was certainly familiar with his former minister's opinions,

¹⁴⁴H. Carnot, 2:239-247.

and he knew that Carnot's opposition was not seditious, nor was it directed at the Emperor alone--it had been directed against Louis XVI, Robespierre, and Barras, all of whom had threatened the republic in their various ways. If Carnot had ever shown the slightest indication of personal ambition, however, Napoleon would not have been so forgiving. As a rule, the Emperor rarely permitted any real ambition--political, military, or administrative--but his own. He frequently castigated anyone who showed signs of either ambition or independence beyond the point which seemed useful to the Empire or to the Emperor himself. Consequently, Napoleon recognized Carnot's lack of personal ambition and because of it, he excused his opposition.

Napoleon's creation of the Legion of Honor that same May was, in Carnot's opinion, the creation of a new system of privilege and distinction. In another speech before the Tribunal, Carnot opposed the Legion.

Doubtless it is a great advantage for a nation to pay tribute, with oak leaves or laurel wreaths, with a cross or with ribbons, to the most important services rendered to it, but if these distinctions become the price of flattery, of espionage, of services even more shameful, then of what use will they be to this nation? Who would sacrifice himself to the most difficult of tasks, to the harshest privations, to obtain these honors? Who would go looking for them in the camps, if he can fill his hands with them in an ante-chamber?¹⁴⁵

Thirty-eight of his colleagues agreed with Carnot's opposition, but again it made no difference. Napoleon even

¹⁴⁵H. Carnot, 2:235.

awarded the Legion's cross to Carnot, who of course never wore it.

As he promised, Carnot was loyal to the legitimate, now imperial, government and he continued to sit in the Tribune until its dissolution in 1807. When some of his colleagues complained to him about the constraints of the régime, and asked what could be done to alleviate them, Carnot answered "It's too late. You have placed Bonaparte so high that you can no longer reach him."¹⁴⁶

Carnot lived in retirement from 1807 until the beginning of 1814, occupied almost exclusively with scientific and engineering studies, and far removed by choice from the political arena. However, the declining military fortunes of the Emperor and the subsequent danger to France prompted Carnot to write to Napoleon on 24 January 1814 "As long as success crowned your efforts, I did not offer the services which I thought might displease you. Today when ill fortune tests your constancy, I no longer hesitate. Doubtless the efforts of a sexagenarian are not much, but I thought that the example of a soldier whose patriotic feelings are well known might rally to you those who are unsure of what to do, and who might be persuaded to serve rather than abandon their country."¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶H. Carnot, 2:248.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., 2:288.

Napoleon accepted Carnot's offer, and sent him to defend Antwerp. From February until the first of April, Antwerp was besieged by the Prussians, British and Swedes, while von Bulow and Bernadotte in particular besieged Carnot with letters inviting him to join the Allied cause. He ignored them completely, even when he was told that Napoleon had abdicated. He refused to surrender Antwerp until the proper authorities in Paris sent word that the abdication was fact rather than rumor. "It is to the Emperor that we have given our oath of fidelity," he told the garrison, "and we shall keep it until it has been proved that his government has ceased to be legitimate."¹⁴⁸ When there was no longer any doubt, Carnot left Antwerp on 3 May and returned to Paris.

VII. THE RESTORATION AND THE HUNDRED DAYS

The Mémoire au roi

The newly restored Bourbons were now the legitimate government. Carnot's philosophy was to accept the legitimately established government--his speeches and writings support this--although he personally felt that Louis XVIII, for obvious reasons, was not likely to continue or even permit the principles of liberty and equality. Nevertheless, Carnot accepted the restoration; he would do

¹⁴⁸H. Carnot, 2:333.

nothing to overturn it despite his personal misgivings. He had no liking for the Bourbons and expected none from them--he was a regicide, after all--but he put in an obligatory appearance at the Tuileries and was coolly received by Louis XVIII, the comte d'Artois and the duc de Berry. Afterwards he commented "These people are not at all French."¹⁴⁹ In spite of his personal reservations about the king, Carnot thought that the constitutional charter which Louis promised would guarantee some liberty at least, even if it were not the same as that which the Republic had guaranteed. Carnot had always been a realist, and he understood that the Revolution, while accomplishing a great deal, nevertheless fell short of the ideal. What remained of its institutions and ideals Carnot wanted to maintain, although he understood that the political climate of the restoration was hardly conducive to his wishes. He noted the existence of "the regrets, the prejudices against all perfectibility, the discouragement of a multitude of honest men who finally realize the futility of their efforts--France lacks a national spirit."¹⁵⁰ France lacked the spirit of 1792, Carnot thought, the spirit of devotion to liberty and pride in the nation and hope for its future. These elements were missing, and the citizens who had been so motivated then by

¹⁴⁹H. Carnot, 2:359.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., 2:367.

what he believed was republican zeal were left only with regrets. The present government offered little encouragement that such a spirit would return.

In July 1814 Carnot collected his political thoughts into an essay which he intended to present to Louis XVIII personally, in order to plead for the continuation of the spirit of liberalism in government, for the hopeful union of all factions in support of the legitimate régime, and for the absence of revenge towards former revolutionaries. This essay, meant only for the king, was circulated among several of the nobles and government officials, and was released for publication under the title Mémoire au roi. Persons close to Louis XVIII and hostile to Carnot were likely responsible for both the unauthorized publication and for denouncing Carnot, who had not signed his essay, to Minister of Police Beugnot.

Given the attitude of Louis XVIII and the nobles who comprised the restoration court, it is easy to see that the Mémoire would not be well-received, in spite of its good intentions. While he acknowledged the Revolution's shortcomings, Carnot placed the blame for the worst abuses squarely on the emigré nobles who deserted Louis XVI and took up arms against their own country. The returning nobles could not honestly expect to find the France of 1789, and repressive measures taken against the revolutionary generation would not restore the Ancien Régime. Carnot

found it ironic that the emigrés were now being called patriots, while those who had defended France were labeled as traitors. Worse than ironic, it was divisive and therefore harmful to any hopes of unifying the nation behind the king. The guarantees in the constitutional charter were, in Carnot's opinion, sufficient for everyone on every side, and the king should certainly not begin his reign by abrogating those guarantees of liberty and representation.¹⁵¹

Carnot's reply to the inquiries raised by Beugnot was less restrained than the Mémoire, and dealt with his interpretation of the causes of the general unrest throughout France.

It is because those who took a more or less active part in the Revolution now see themselves, as a result of measures already taken, threatened with the loss of their employment, considered as members of a proscribed class, they and their families thought of as serfs in their native land. Proscription threatened not just the *conventionnels* and those linked to them by kinship and affection, but those who supported the vote [to execute Louis XVI] by their speeches and their acquiescence--they comprise at least three-fourths of the French people....Their fears can cease only by the undoubted promises of the king, [and] only the pardoning of the past can reconcile all interests and reunite the French people.¹⁵²

Hippolyte Carnot has suggested that the Mémoire was not well-received because his father thought the best way to insure that the government was put back on the right track was to point out all its faults. This method never

¹⁵¹Dupre, p. 271.

¹⁵²Tissot, p. 328.

succeeds, he adds, and Carnot's use of it was in "terms which were the least insinuating; in spite of a certain oratorical prudence, the Mémoire had a sharpness of language and a virulent irony which was entirely inappropriate for its intention."¹⁵³

Carnot wrote to his younger brother on 2 October that it had never been his intention to write for publication, and that he had not authorized the publication of the Mémoire in whole or in part, in spite of the present government's partiality for the "hack journalists who fan the flames of discord." If there is trouble as a result of its publication, he continued, then the government will have no one to blame but itself.¹⁵⁴ There was trouble for Carnot, of course, but he was placed under police observation only, and not proscribed. If anything, the reception of the Mémoire proved to him that Louis XVIII was as inflexibly autocratic as Carnot was inflexibly republican, and no agreement between the two seemed possible.

Minister Again

When Napoleon was en route to Paris from Elba in March 1815, Carnot met with Cambacères and told him that he planned to support the Emperor, since an "implacable hatred"

¹⁵³H. Carnot, 2:388.

¹⁵⁴Tissot, p. 332.

existed between himself and the Bourbons. Carnot said that Napoleon must be held in check, to avoid the reinstitution of the Empire's former repressive measures.¹⁵⁵ Carnot must have realized that checking Napoleon would be a difficult task, but he did not think it would be an impossible one. He thought that Napoleon was a changed man after a year of exile, although he had seen that the Bourbons and their entourage had not changed at all after twenty-five years of exile.¹⁵⁶

Carnot also knew that Napoleon's return was welcomed by an enthusiasm arising less from admiration and loyalty and more from fear and dislike of the current régime. The foreign powers were not likely to permit the re-establishment of the Empire without strong opposition, and the resulting need for national defense decided Carnot more perhaps than the hope of returning to a republican government, which he still wished for, or at least a government more liberal than the Empire had been.¹⁵⁷ "The question is reduced to knowing whether you work towards national independence before you work towards liberty," he said, "or whether you work towards liberty before insuring national independence. Everything else can be postponed,

¹⁵⁵Dupre, p. 273.

¹⁵⁶H. Carnot, 2:423.

¹⁵⁷Reinhard, 2:323.

but the need to avoid an ignominious bondage cannot be postponed. The need to defend territorial integrity permits no hesitation."¹⁵⁸

Napoleon offered Carnot the position of Minister of Interior at the end of March 1815, and Carnot accepted. Napoleon also made Carnot a Count of the Empire, but Carnot never acknowledged the title and left the patent unclaimed. He who had never had any use for hereditary nobility and its privileges was the wrong man to elevate to the peerage. "Those who accept noble distinctions thereby reveal their own inferiority," he noted.¹⁵⁹ However, Carnot did not hesitate to use his position and whatever influence he had to see the "friends of the Revolution" placed in influential posts, giving France both confident defenders and firm liberals who could contain--or so he hoped--the "despotic eccentricities" of Napoleon.¹⁶⁰

When Napoleon proposed the Additional Act to the constitution, which was accepted by popular vote on 1 June, Carnot was disillusioned to see that it fell far short of the reforms which he believed had been promised. He opposed it in the strongest terms expressed directly to the Emperor: "Your Additional Act does more harm to your cause than the

¹⁵⁸H. Carnot, 2:411.

¹⁵⁹Dupre, p. 274.

¹⁶⁰H. Carnot, 2:444.

loss of a battle, and those who sign it will compromise some of their prestige, along with your own. I will sign it because the interests of France dominate all other considerations with me."¹⁶¹ Carnot was continuing his habit of protesting on the grounds of one or more of his principles but acquiescing for specific reasons: to preserve unity, to serve a need larger than his principles, to show support, though it was grudging at best, when circumstances were critical enough for him to feel that his support was necessary. In the case of the Additional Act, Carnot's refusal to sign would probably have had little consequence for either Carnot's position in government or for Napoleon personally--the Emperor's Act had been voted on by the Nation and accepted, and Carnot's signature was a formality. The consequences for Carnot would come shortly from another source; his signature in this case guaranteed his proscription by Louis XVIII.

During the Hundred Days Carnot kept busy with a number of tasks within the jurisdiction of his ministry while he remained aware of events outside it. He addressed members of the new national guard which Napoleon had created in April, and his comments reflected some of his favorite themes.

The national guard, composed of all citizens, is nothing less than the nation itself. I hasten...to

¹⁶¹H. Carnot, 2:430.

address His Majesty's decree of 10 April organizing the guard in every department. This measure, confided to your zeal and patriotism, is in this final stage of the French Revolution the surest bond of our liberty, the most efficacious guarantee of our external independence and our internal security....All the guarantees are to be found in this great means of national defense--that of our political rights and our fundamental laws.¹⁶²

Carnot prepared an extensive report on public instruction in April which was very reminiscent of his work on the former Committee of Public Instruction. France should follow the example of the United States, he proposed, which provides educational opportunities in every town and village, and where the cultivation of intellect is as important as the cultivation of the soil. Unfortunately, European civilization fostered an inequality of fortune, which was the inevitable consequence of the preponderance of great societies, and which resulted in a corresponding inequality of access to the benefits of education. Under such conditions, Carnot asked, how could the largest class in society be exposed to such benefits? Education without morality implicit within it could only awaken new needs more dangerous perhaps than ignorance itself, and therefore morality must go hand in hand with education.¹⁶³ With his characteristic thoroughness, Carnot proposed a detailed plan of primary education for all citizens. Napoleon approved it, but subsequent events prevented its implementation.

¹⁶²H. Carnot, 2:491.

¹⁶³Tissot, p. 339.

A departmental prefect who had been overly conscientious in his duties found himself the object of Carnot's displeasure; the prefect had violated some of the Minister of the Interior's principles, probably without even realizing it, but Carnot did not think that ignorance was sufficient excuse.

I was informed that in several parts of the Empire the privacy of correspondence has been violated by the administration's agents. Who could have authorized such measures? Did they say that they wished to serve the government? This does not serve the Emperor--it slanders him. He does not ask for this, he rejects any such service which is outside the law....All our misfortunes in the many stages of the Revolution came from the violation of its principles....The thoughts of a French citizen should be as free as his person.¹⁶⁴

The relationship between Napoleon and Carnot during the Hundred Days was more cordial than it had ever been, though the two still disagreed on several key issues. Carnot was committed as ever to his principles and just as ready to voice them, but perhaps now Napoleon was more willing to listen and to value the inflexible tendencies of his minister. "You can organize a campaign plan better than I can," Napoleon told Carnot, "but I know how to win a battle better than you do. You're right in principle, but my political outlook requires a master stroke." Carnot later remarked to his brother Feulint that "Napoleon will bet his country and ours on the turn of a single card. If he loses, France is the foreigner's prize. This man simply does not

¹⁶⁴Tissot, p. 350.

understand that the head of a great state has other duties besides those of an adventurer."¹⁶⁵

After Waterloo, Napoleon sent Carnot to announce the abdication on 22 June to the Chamber of Peers. Shortly afterwards the Chamber of Peers and the Chamber of Representatives elected a five-member provisional government, and Carnot headed the list. The only duty which this government seemed to perform was to dissolve itself on 8 July; Louis XVIII adjourned both chambers on the same day. On 24 July the first proscription list appeared.

Proscription and Permanent Exile

If Louis XVIII had been even marginally inclined towards exhibiting any leniency for the former revolutionaries during the first restoration, he was implacably set against them now at the beginning of the second. There were exceptions, of course--men such as Talleyrand, Caulaincourt, and Fouché, who changed their principles and their allegiances with apparent effortlessness--but Carnot had not been able to do so. He was the only member of the ministry of the Hundred Days to appear among the names of persons exiled from Paris and placed under police surveillance. He believed his proscription was due to the Mémoire au roi of the previous

¹⁶⁵H. Carnot, 2:502.

year, although his signature on Napoleon's Additional Act was given as the official reason.¹⁶⁶

Carnot left Paris for good and retired to Cerny under the promised surveillance. He said at the time of his proscription that "I know of a crime which surpasses all crimes, and it is that of a king who solicits the help of powerful foreigners to oppress his own country."¹⁶⁷ Such had been the crime of Louis XVI, and it was also the crime of Louis XVIII, Carnot thought; the former was executed for it, while the latter was rewarded with power and legitimacy.

While in Cerny, Carnot wrote to a friend, Palissot de Beauvois, to explain the events of the past months. The letter, reflecting Carnot's feelings, would also serve as the basis for a much longer and more public explanation.

Although it is against my principles to despair of the nation's welfare, I admit that I do not believe I could serve again with any usefulness. If France were only unfortunate, I wouldn't hesitate to offer the least of my abilities, but she is withered away, and her past glory does not seem likely to return before the end of my career. When I offered my services to Bonaparte in 1814, I overcame my antipathy [towards him] to serve my country, and no one could have thought I did so for ambitious reasons. But to offer my services to the king today would violate all propriety, and I do not think that the duc d'Otrante [Fouché] finds many who approve of his conduct.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶H. Carnot, 2:554.

¹⁶⁷Reinhard, 2:330.

¹⁶⁸Tissot, p. 366.

Still in "retirement" at Cerny, Carnot wrote the longer explanation of his conduct of the preceding year, although he doubted that anything would alter his proscribed status, and that was not his intention in any case. The Exposé de la conduite politique de Carnot depuis le 1^{er} juillet 1814 was the last formal political document which Carnot wrote, and it was the last which dealt with the "oddities" of his political life. In the event that any reader of the Exposé should have forgotten these oddities, Carnot thoughtfully recalled them.

I shared with my colleagues the good fortune of saving Paris, and by a coup d'état I was exiled from Paris.

I was charged with hating Napoleon because I alone opposed his first step toward the throne; I am one of the very few who never burned incense before his altar, and yet they have counted me among those who put him on the throne.

I complained to the king about the abuses which the agents of his power allowed to be committed against the constitutional charter which he had given us, and they say that these complaints were an outrage to His Majesty.

I always professed to obey the established government, and they depict me as a trouble-maker who was busy going from revolution to revolution.

I was Robespierre's most mortal enemy, and they made me into his accomplice; I jumped into the breach to prevent reaction, and they made me into a reactionary.

I spent days and nights supporting the operations of our armies, and they show me as being occupied drawing up orders of arrest. I was always the enemy of conquests, and they say that I thought only of war, invasions, and the disruption of states.

I never asked for positions or favors, and I am no wealthier now than I was at the beginning of the

Revolution, yet they say I am greedy for domination and fortune. I offered my services to the head of state when the nation's welfare was at its lowest ebb, and they say I did it for ambition.

Charged with the defense of an important place [Antwerp], I won the soldiers' confidence and maintained order and security among the inhabitants, and they say I was nothing but a despot and a vandal.

I loved and cultivated science and letters, and they say I wanted to disorganize public instruction.

I loved my country, and perhaps soon I will have to ask for the generosity of foreign princes and an asylum in their lands.¹⁶⁹

Carnot was right in his last prophecy, and he left France in October, before Louis XVIII's agents could arrest and imprison him. His aimless itinerary took him over most of Europe, and when he was in Warsaw he learned of the 12 January 1816 "law of exception" which condemned him to permanent exile. He never returned to France, and died in Magdebourg on 2 August 1823. During the Republican presidency of his grandson Sadi, Carnot's remains were brought to Paris and interred in the Panthéon.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Reinhard asks whether Carnot was indeed the wise, moderate, and purely military man which a somewhat hagiographic tradition has presented, of whether he was a revolutionary in the fullest sense of the term, committed to the most radical changes using the most violent means. He

¹⁶⁹Tissot, pp. 366-370.

also asks whether Carnot's ideology was straightforward and unchanging throughout his political career, or whether, like his colleagues, he evolved and adapted his political thought and actions to circumstances throughout the course of successive régimes. Finally, Reinhard wonders if Carnot was really the "Organizer of Victory," or whether he merely usurped that reputation for himself.

These questions are valid ones and must be asked in order to place Carnot's political role in perspective. These questions must also be answered in order to evaluate Carnot's political ideology and to determine whether or not it remained constant once he established it. There is a certain danger, however, in attempting to define Carnot's ideology and to evaluate his political career in terms of Reinhard's "either/or" questions, for the evidence of Carnot's speeches and writings indicate that such a categorization is difficult at best. Palmer argues, for instance, that the Committee of Public Safety was revolutionary and therefore each of its twelve members were revolutionaries. Hippolyte Carnot presents his father as a moderate who had little or nothing to do with terrorists, while Mathiez seems to dislike Carnot because he was not revolutionary enough, or at least not in the same league as his hero, Robespierre. Carnot himself said that he was a purely military man, but later he also insisted that he

participated in all the Committee's decisions and was not confined to military matters alone.

The evidence shows rather that at least part of Carnot's ideology--his opposition to privilege, inequality and factions, and his support of the legitimate government despite any personal reservations--did not vary according to circumstances. Part of his ideology--the sovereignty of the people, the supremacy of the general interest over individual interests, the specific nature of a republican form of government--was less inflexible and more subject to changes in political circumstances. It evolved, as Reinhard suggests, during successive stages in the Revolution and the Empire, and to a lesser extent in the Bourbon Restoration. The evidence also shows that while Carnot preferred a moderate political course--although he said that there was no such thing as a "moderate" political party--he supported many of the Committee of Public Safety's radical actions because he believed that extreme circumstances made extreme measures necessary. At one point or the other during the ten years 1789-1799, Carnot exhibited some of the political characteristics of both the Girondins and the Jacobins, though he never adopted wholesale the politics of either party. It was not a case of conscious assimilation of party politics, for in the final analysis, Carnot's political ideology cannot be classified by a particular label for the sake of convenience.

Whether or not Carnot deserves the reputation of "Organizer of Victory"--the epithet pronounced by an unknown deputy which saved Carnot during the months following Thermidor--is a moot point in terms of this analysis. Certainly Carnot's talent for organization and his military expertise enhanced his political opportunities, but the degree of responsibility for organizing the victories of 1792-1794 is not as important as the understanding of the military's role in Carnot's political thought. He organized victory through innovations, coordination, and careful attention to an incredible number of details, but his goal was not the mere winning of battles; it was to defend France against the coalition of monarchs and emigré princes who threatened the Revolution, and to guarantee the continuance of liberty and equality. The organization of victory became part of Carnot's legend while he still lived, and that legend has often seemed to limit most evaluations of Carnot's career--the military has dominated or obscured the political.

Reinhard attributes a sort of "enlightened naïveté" to Carnot's ideals; he finds this especially true whenever Carnot speaks of a republic, since Reinhard doubts that a republic could have existed then in the strict political sense. Possibly not, Hippolyte Carnot counters, but the guiding spirit of a republican régime, regardless of its external forms and the breadth of its political boundaries,

is a strong ethical sense, developed into a positive science whose goals are specific: to cement the interdependence of state and citizen, to delineate the rights each owes to the other, and to create a "social welfare" not subject to whims and empty promises.

These ideals may seem naïve at first, either through Reinhard's assessment of political reality or through Hippolyte Carnot's explanation of his father's intentions, but it is difficult to argue that Carnot's belief in a representative assembly and other similar institutions as integral components of a republic was impractical. In point of fact, Carnot's ideas of a republican form of government, those which arose from his basic principles and those which were more pragmatic, were similar to those of his political colleagues, and they would have more or less concrete results during the first ten years of the revolutionary period. Those results may not always have adhered to the letter of Carnot's ideal, but the prevailing philosophical spirit was certainly present in the institutions either grafted onto Ancien Régime stock or created out of whole cloth by Carnot and his contemporaries who shared those ideals.

Hippolyte Carnot maintains throughout his book that his father was an idealist who was fortunate--or clever--enough to have a practical nature which kept his idealism within certain bounds. These bounds meant that political theory

became political practice in much the same way as Carnot's theory on the use of machines became scientific practice. He implies that Carnot did not believe ideology alone was sufficient; it must be translated into practical applications, since a political theory is like a differential equation--useless without proof.

Reinhard's view of Carnot's "enlightened naïveté" is based, as he admits, on the fact that Carnot's ideas came largely from the eighteenth-century *philosophes*, particularly the belief in the ability and influence of "the people's spirit," and the concept that nothing was as widespread as "good sense," which would perfect itself and progress indefinitely. Carnot was therefore both a product of the Enlightenment and a "precursor of the age of polytechnicians." If Carnot's ideology was truly naïve, then the naïveté was expressed in the examples which Reinhard cites: Carnot's feeling in 1796 that the Revolution had deceived him by permitting wealth and birth to replace talent as criteria for positions in government and in the army; the conflict between Carnot's idea of a republic and the various political realities which continued to confront him; and that certainly in the realm of politics and economics, Carnot's ideology had a great deal in common with Saint-Simon's. Reinhard infers from the first two examples that a political realist would know that historically wealth and property are the easiest roads to power, just as he

would understand that ideal forms of government change in varying degrees when they are removed from the realm of concept and put into practice. Reinhard's Saint-Simonian analogy is based on that philosophy's view of the nature of property and its ownership--a cornerstone of the bourgeoisie's concern for the inviolability of property, as Lefebvre mentions when he dismisses Carnot as a bourgeois conservative. Reinhard also adds that Hippolyte Carnot inherited some of his Saint-Simonian ideology from his father and carried it into his own political career.

Carnot's contemporaries never doubted his patriotism, and later historians, whatever their individual political leanings might be, have not questioned it. What seemed difficult for Carnot's associates to comprehend and what has proved controversial for historians is the fact that, patriotism aside, Carnot's political ideology--or his "versatile ambition," to use Reinhard's term--took him through régimes as disparate as the Republic and the Empire, with all the stages in between. For this to be the case, Carnot had to have compromised or at least bent his principles on more than one occasion, which he did, not from personal ambition but for what he claimed was the greater good of the state. Carnot served any government legitimately established, either directly through his position as deputy, Committee member, Director or minister,

or indirectly as a private citizen. As he explained in 1821 from exile in Magdebourg:

My opinion is not that the forms of government are immaterial, but that when one is established, it must remain as it is or at least be only slowly modified in order to avoid new revolutions. That is why I always worked to maintain the de facto government...not because I believed it to be necessarily the best, but because I thought it was better than another revolution....¹⁷⁰

There was little for Carnot to like about either the Directory or the Empire, but he served in both governments to insure that liberty--or at least some of the Revolution's liberalism--remained intact. There was even less for Carnot to approve after the restoration of the Bourbons, but as an established government, his principles required him to support it. His attempt through the Mémoire au roi to educate Louis XVIII in the value of liberalism was a failure and cost him his freedom.

If at any time Carnot had been more politically and personally ambitious, more far-seeing and more willing to adapt himself and his ideology to preserve what he believed should be preserved of the Revolution, and less politically naïve and inflexible, his public career could have been quite different, especially after Thermidor. Carnot was often his own worst political enemy, for he refused to minimize his actions when it would have been expedient to do so, and his frequently narrow and unshakable stance seemed

¹⁷⁰Tissot, p. 205.

an affront to his more politically adaptable colleagues. Nevertheless, his principles were more important to him than the possibility of rewards earned through compromise, and he took his principles intact with him into exile. In this case, one might say that virtue was Carnot's only reward.

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APPENDIX

PUBLISHED WORKS OF LAZARE CARNOT

Eloge de M. le maréchal de Vauban, par M. Carnot, capitaine au corps Royal du Génie. Dijon and Paris, 1784.

Observations sur la lettre de M. Choderlos de Laclos à MM. de l'Académie française, concernant l'Eloge de Vauban, par M. Carnot. Arras and Paris, 1786.

Essai sur les machines en général, par un officier du Génie. Dijon, 1783.

Mémoire présenté au Conseil de la guerre, au sujet des places fortes (without author's name). Paris, 1789.

Réclamation adressée à l'Assemblée nationale, contre le régime oppressif sous lequel est gouverné le corps du Génie, par M. Carnot, capitaine dans le corps. Paris, 1789.

Carnot l'aîné, député du Pas-de-Calais, à ses collègues, au sujet des bastilles. Paris, 5 January 1792.

Rapport sur les réparations et indemnités dues à la mémoire et aux familles de Dillon et Berthois. Paris, 9 June 1792.

Décret de l'Assemblée nationale sur une fabrication de piques, précédé du rapport de Carnot. Paris, 1 August 1792.

Rapport fait à la Convention nationale, par ses commissaires Carnot, Garrau et Lamarque, envoyés aux frontières des Pyrénées. Paris, 12 January 1793.

Rapport sur la levée d'une légion pour l'armée des Pyrénées, présenté au nom du Comité de défense générale. Paris, 29 January 1793.

Rapport sur la réunion, au territoire de la République, de plusieurs enclaves et pays circonvoisins, présenté au nom du Comité diplomatique. Paris, 14 February 1793.

Declaration des droits du citoyen, proposée par Carnot. Paris, 10 March 1793.

Rapport sur la manufacture extraordinaire d'armes établie à Paris, fait au nom du Comité de salut public. Paris, 3 November 1793.

Projet de décret sur la réquisition des armes de guerre. Paris, 16 December 1793.

Rapport sur la suppression du Conseil exécutif et son remplacement par des Commissions particulières, présenté au nom du Comité de salut public. Paris, 1 April 1794.

Réponse du président de la Convention à l'adresse des Jacobins de Paris. Paris, 16 May 1794.

Rapport sur la reprise des quatre places de la frontière du nord. Paris, 22 September 1794.

Compte-rendu, par Carnot, représentant du peuple, de ses dépenses dans les diverses missions qu'il a remplies. Paris, 9 February 1795.

Campagne des Français depuis le 22 fructidor de l'an 1^{er} jusqu'au 15 pluviôse an III, précédé du rapport de Carnot. Paris, 4 March 1795.

Opinion de Carnot, représentant, sur l'accusation portée contre Billaud-Varenne, Collot d'Herbois, etc., par la Commissions des vingt-un. Paris, March 1795.

Discours prononcé par le président du Directoire à la fête de la Reconnaissance et des Victoires. Paris, March 1796.

Discours prononcé à la fête de la Liberté, le 9 thermidor an IV. Paris, September 1796.

Discours prononcé à la fête commémorative du 14 juillet, le 26 messidor an V. Paris, July 1797.

Réflexions sur la métaphysique du Calcul infinitésimal. Paris, 1797.

Réponse de L.-N.-M. Carnot, citoyen français, l'un des fondateurs de la République et membre constitutionnel du Directoire exécutif, au rapport fait au Conseil des cinq-cents, par J.-Ch. Bailleul, au nom d'une Commission spéciale. 8 floréal an VI. April 1798.

Lettre du citoyen Carnot au citoyen Bossut, contenant des vues nouvelles sur la trigonométrie. September 1799.

De la Correlation des figures de géométrie, par Carnot, membre de l'Institut national. Paris, 1801.

Géométrie de position. Paris, 1803.

Mémoire sur la relation qui existe entre les distances respectives de cinq points pris dans l'espace, suivi d'un essai sur la théorie des transversales. Paris, 1806.

Principes fondamentaux de l'équilibre et du mouvement. Paris, 1803.

De la défense des places fortes. Paris, 1810.

De la stabilité des corps flottants. Rapport fait à la première classe de l'Institut. Paris, 1814.

Discours prononcé au Tribunat, par le citoyen Carnot, sur la motion relative au gouvernement héréditaire. Paris, 1804.

Mémoire adressé au roi en juillet 1814. Paris, 1814.

Exposé de la situation de l'Empire, présenté à la Chambre des pairs, par le ministre de l'intérieur. Paris, 1815.

Exposé de la conduite politique du lieutenant-général Carnot depuis le 1^{er} juillet 1814. Paris, 1815.

Recueil des poésies diverses, par le général Carnot. Paris, 1820.

Don Quichotte, poème héroï-comique, par L.-N.-M. Carnot. Paris and Leipzig, 1821.

Mémoire sur la fortification primitive, pour servir de suite à la Défense des places fortes. Paris, 1823.